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Film Quarterly
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Your Own Reality: An Interview with Paolo and Vittorio Taviani

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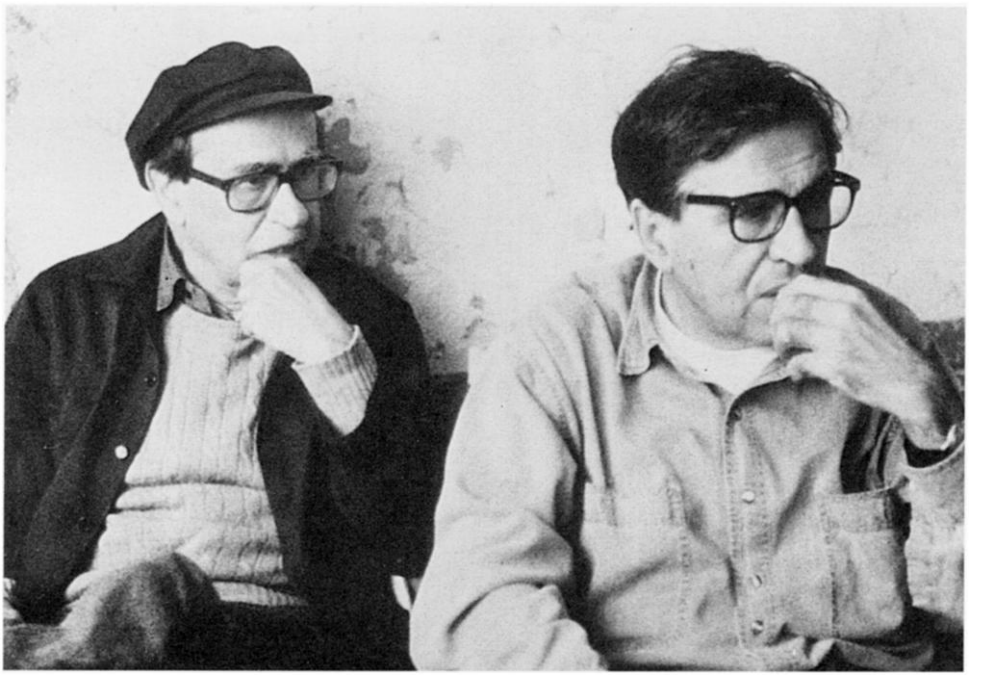


Vittorio (left) and Paolo Taviani on the set of *Fiorile*

Your

An Interview

For over three decades, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani have held a place apart, not only in Italian filmmaking, but in world cinema as a whole. Though initially inspired by neorealism, the Tuscan-born brothers quickly went beyond its quasi-documentary approach to embrace myth, fantasy, and folk legend. All of the Tavianis' best films—*Under the Sign of Scorpio* (1969), *Allonsanfan* (1974), *Padre Padrone* (1977), *The Meadow* (1979), *The Night of the Shooting Stars* (1981), and *Kaos* (1985)—deal with individuals and groups battling against oppression. But unlike most of the other socially conscious film-makers of their generation (Pasolini being another marked exception), the Tavianis have refused to sidestep the role of the irrational in human affairs. As a result, Taviani films offer a full intellectual and emotional engagement with worlds outside that of the bourgeoisie. At the same time, their respect for the imaginative life of the individual brings fresh meaning to the "personal is political" emphasis of modern social theory.

The Tavianis' latest film, *Fiorile,* is a "family romance," tracing the fortunes of a Tuscan dynasty over the course of 200 years. But unlike the sagas of Visconti or Bertolucci, the Tavianis' film deals with the bourgeoisie's peasant roots. Moreover, it deals with not only overt social history but with the covert history of legend and folk tale as well.

As a family drives across the landscape of modern Tuscany on their way to their ancestral home, the father, Luigi Benedetti (Lino Capolicchio), regales his small son and daughter with tales of the origins of their fortune. In a flashback to the late eighteenth century, we see Jean (Michael Vartan), a soldier in Napoleon's invading army, distracted by a beautiful peasant girl, Elisabetta Benedetti (Galataea Ranzi) as he guards a cache of gold. He calls her "Fiorile" after the season so named in the revolutionary calendar. When the girl's brother steals the gold, tragedy results. The lovers die, but the brother keeps the cache, thus bringing about the family's rise from the peasantry to the middle class.

David Ehrenstein

Own Reality

with Paolo and Vittorio Taviani

One hundred years later, the now-wealthy Benedettis find themselves in the midst of more family trouble when the daughter of the house (Galataea Ranzi again) falls for a peasant youth. When her brothers plot to have her lover and his family sent to South America, she takes her revenge by poisoning them. Once again the battle between love and gold ends in death.

In the 1940s, the family curse provokes a different sort of tragedy as young Massimo Benedetti (Michael Vartan again) works to fight the fascists. Captured with a number of other partisans, he witnesses his friends' execution while he is spared because of his family name. Finally, in the present, the car arrives at the home of the aged, guilt-ridden Massimo—now revealed to be Luigi's father. The only note of hope is sounded by the children, who have taken the family history to heart and seem certain to learn from it.

The following interview took place in Los Angeles, in November of 1993.

DAVID EHRENSTEIN: *Where did the idea for* Fiorile *come from?*

VITTORIO TAVIANI: From our mother. From the time we were kids, we heard the story of the girl, the soldier, and the cache of gold. We were always struck by the fact that the sudden appearance of this gold in such a simple society—which has very transparent, clear values—caused such a violent conflagration. The blood of an innocent is spilled and a family's history is changed forever because of gold. They become part of the upper class. As Balzac said, there is no great rich family that doesn't have a skeleton in its closet.

PAOLO TAVIANI: We thought someday we'd make a film about this story, but like many ideas, it was put in a drawer. Then about three years ago we started to smell the stench of social corruption in Italy in a new way.

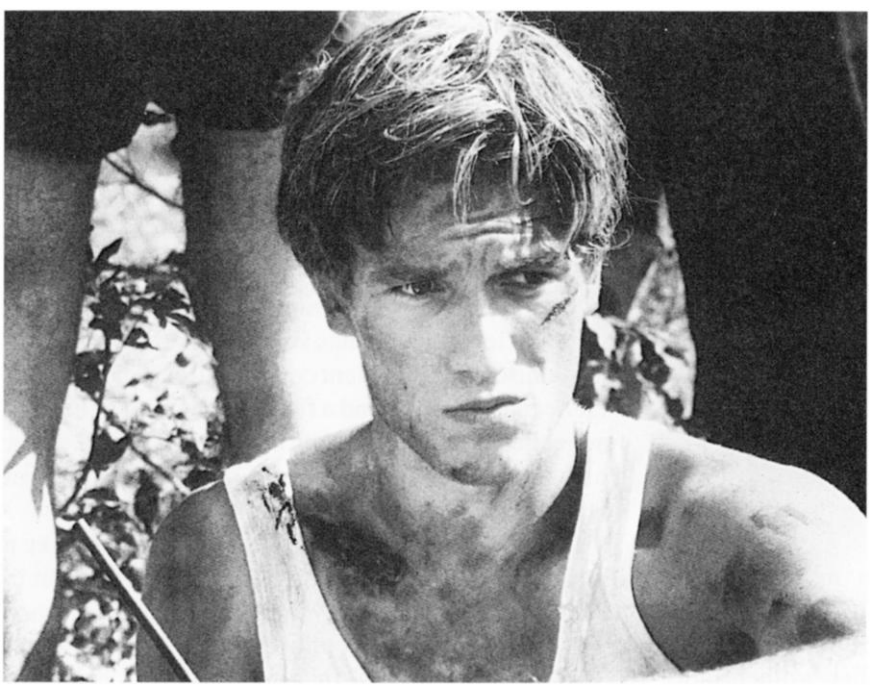
VITTORIO: Naturally, this stench doesn't exist just in Italy!

PAOLO: Young people are very disoriented today. They say, "You've got to get ahead by any means possible because the only thing that counts is getting power and using it—any way you want." So that old story our mother told us came to mind, and we realized that we could start from this one story and work it through an entire family history up to the present day.

VITTORIO: We're telling a story, which is eternal, of two great powers clashing together. On one side is the power of gold when it's not properly used, and on the other the power of those who oppose this in the name of love. Love between men and women is part of this, but so is love for one's fellow man. This love symbolizes belief in a future that's different from today—a future that is more just.

The different segments of the film aren't just separated by historical periods; they're shot in different styles as well. You begin with a kind of folk tale, then move on to something out of a nineteenth-century novel, and then go on to the postwar realist mode of writers like Cesare Pavese and Carlo Levi.

VITTORIO: Yes, that's true, but the idea that was most important to us in the making of this film—to tie all these stories and styles together—was the car. We would never have shot *Fiorile* if we hadn't conceived of the image of the car, with the family inside of it, traveling over the landscape of Tuscany. It allowed us to cross both time and space. It's like a spaceship in a science-fiction film.



Michael Vartan as Jean in *Fiorile*

PAOLO: For us, making films means being able to take very concrete reality, break it apart and enter into fields of fantasy, and then come back again to reality. The film is sending messages to the viewer, but it never arrives at definite conclusions about those messages. At the end of John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,* there's something very beautiful: one newspaperman asks another, "Am I supposed to believe the true story or should I believe the legend?" The answer is "Print the legend." It's in the legend that you'll find the truth. That's what *Fiorile* is about.

Fassbinder said that the reason he made The Marriage of Maria Braun *was that it was impossible to find out from his parents anything about what happened during World War II. They didn't want to talk about it. I get the sense in* Fiorile *of your feeling very responsible for setting the record straight as well, but in an emotional way as much as a political way.*

PAOLO: We needed to do something aside from just telling the story—something that could help us know ourselves better. And we wanted to pass something along to our families. We both have sons. I think that if anyone in Europe stopped and looked around today, he would shrug his shoulders and say, "This is a terrible world." We must go back to the past to understand what we've become. *Fiorile* shows that there has always been rebellion against the status quo, and life has gone on in spite of all the problems and contradictions. A young person will feel that he's less alone if he finds examples in the past of his present situation. It's a way to build a future.

I want to ask you about the Italian cinema today. Here in America we get to see so little of it.

VITTORIO: That's the fault of the Americans. They make beautiful films, but too many of them!

A few years ago I saw a film that impressed me as few Italian films have in a long time: Palombella Rossa, *by Nanni Moretti. What do you think of his work?*

PAOLO: Well to start with, after the neorealist movement, there was a reaction in the 1960s from the generation that we are part of: Marco Ferreri, Marco Bellocchio, Pasolini, Bertolucci. That generation tried for 20 years to create a change in the Italian cinema, but then everything stopped. It seemed that there were no new film-makers coming along. The only real author to have come along since then is Nanni Moretti.

VITTORIO: He is a very good friend of ours. He had a small acting role in *Padre Padrone*. He wanted to be our assistant director, but we told him, "No, you're not

an A.D.; you'll have to make your own film." So he shot his first film, *I Am an Anarchist*, in Super-8. He's a very important author in Italian cinema, in that he succeeds in speaking about himself from the vantage point of *all* of Italian reality.

There's a strain of character comedy in the Italian cinema that is also social comedy. I'm thinking of people as diverse as Toto, Alberto Sordi, and Roberto Begnini. And Moretti would seem to be part of that tradition as well.

PAOLO: Begnini is a small genius—a son of Boccaccio. Nanni is more of a real author than Begnini. Other comedians, like Toto and Alberto Sordi, were enormous hits in Italy, but haven't had much success in other countries. Part of this is because most of the films that they appeared in were mediocre. Nanni, on the other hand, because he's the director himself, is an enormous improvement over the situation of the past. His films are very well loved not only in Italy but in France. In the United States he still hasn't made his mark.

Why?

VITTORIO: Maybe it's because the Italian political situation is very particular. For example, what the left means in Italy—the Communist party—is something completely different from what it means in America. In America, Communism was simply a monster: Stalin. In Italy, Communism was quite different—more like the liberal left in America. But there's no way an American public used to seeing Communism as a monster could deal with Italian Communism.

You spoke of Italian film-making coming to a kind of stop in the wake of your generation. Don't you think a lot of this has to do with certain Italian film-makers becoming "international"—like Visconti, Antonioni, and Bertolucci? Surely the Bertolucci of Before the Revolution *is an entirely different person from the Bertolucci of* The Sheltering Sky.

PAOLO: Yes, but Bernardo, even when he made *Before the Revolution*, always dreamt of working "in the world." He loved von Sternberg and Max Ophuls—those European directors who came to the United States and without betraying their personalities established themselves outside of their own countries.

You yourselves made an "international" film: Good Morning Babylon. . . .

Chiara Caselli as Chiara in *Fiorile*

VITTORIO: That was because of the man who became our producer, Ed Pressman. Initially we didn't think it was a very workable project. But Pressman, who is a very talented person and has become a friend of ours, came to Rome. He told us, "I'd like you to do this film for me in the same way as the ones you've done up to now."

So we made the film. It belongs to our body of work—how "good" or "bad" is another story. We're really happy that our most Italian films—*Padre Padrone* and *The Night of the Shooting Stars*—came to America and were loved by Americans. It's important that every film-maker is able to bring the reality he knows outside the borders of his country.

PAOLO: To us, the more provincial a film is, the more international it can become. Just think of the fact

The Tavianis' *The Night of the Shooting Stars*

that Federico Fellini—a great master—kept talking in film after film about life in the little province of Rimini where he grew up. And out of that he became the most famous director in the world!

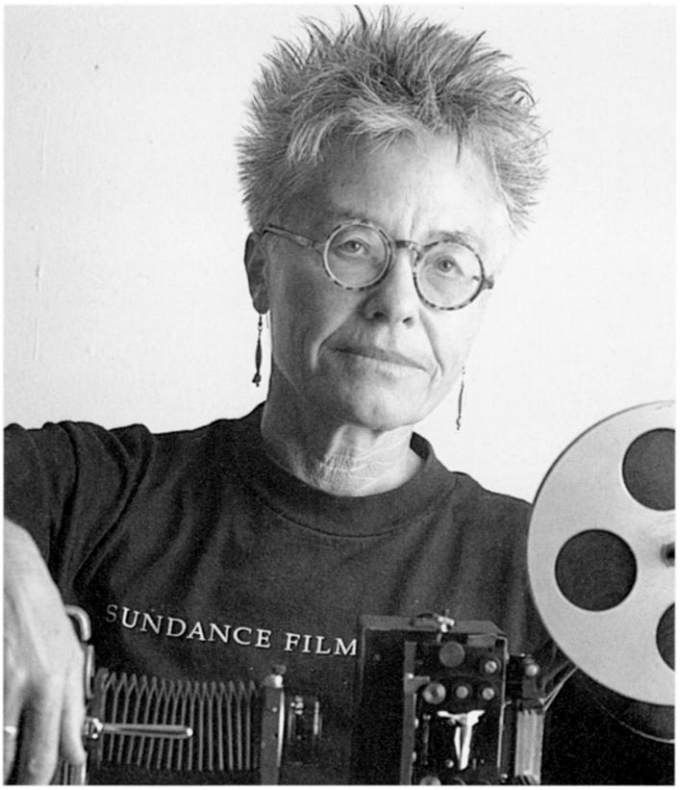
VITTORIO: For us another great master—who is not Italian—is John Ford. John Ford is like our father. He spoke to us about America. Everything we know about America came from his work. This is what's really important about films—communicating to other people in other countries about your own world, your own reality.

■ David Ehrenstein is the author of *The Scorsese Pictures: The Art & Life of Martin Scorsese* (Birch Lane Press, 1992) and *Film: The Front Line—1984* (Arden Press, 1984).

I am very pleased that David Ehrenstein is not only a frequent contributor to *Film Quarterly* but now our new Los Angeles Editor. We—Ernest Callenbach, the *FQ* editorial board members, and I—would like to thank Michael Dempsey for many years of fruitful collaboration. He has been one of the journal's most faithful contributors, and we are very grateful for his past and continuing support.

A. M.

Holly Willis



Uncommon History

An Interview with Barbara Hammer

"Who is the angel of history?" asks Barbara Hammer in her latest film, *Nitrate Kisses* (1992). The reference to Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* marks Hammer's growing interest in academic theory, and indeed, *Nitrate Kisses* illustrates many of the characteristics that constitute a poststructuralist notion of history, such as nonlinearity and a refusal to speak for everyone.

Hammer, who began making short films in the early 1970s, is known for work that is both stridently lesbian and boldly experimental. Some of her films are short portraits of lesbian life, documenting a growing lesbian community in San Francisco in the 1970s. Others are humorous stories which play with mythological images of women and critique the patriarchal world. *Superdyke* (1975), for example, is a spoof of the Superman character and the macho ideology that subtends the hero; other early films, like *Menses* (1974) and *Women I Love* (1976), celebrate and reclaim aspects of femininity denigrated by a male-identified culture.

In most of her work, Hammer experiments with formal qualities, often animating segments of her films or using superimpositions and optical printing techniques. Hammer has consistently created lesbian erotica, and states that her film *Dyketactics* (1974) is the

first erotic lesbian film made by a lesbian. She has also worked toward constructing a kind of cinema that appeals to the viewer's sense of touch. Whether it is a massage sequence in *Superdyke* or the incredible fluidity and cool wetness of *Pools* (1981, made with Barbara Klutinis), Hammer succeeds in powerfully affecting one's somatic state.

Nitrate Kisses, which is her fiftieth film and, at 67 minutes, her longest, takes all of these qualities to a new level and also adds a strong intellectual edge. Shot, recorded, and edited by Hammer, the film is a harsh critique of the marginalization of gays and lesbians from "common history," and while it attempts to redress the gap and offer a history, or series of histories, it does so in a manner cognizant of the impossibility of history. This "history," then, is an amalgamation of voices and stories culled from eclectic sources, none of which is privileged over another. The film attempts to show the processes of history-making (i.e., the collection and identification of fragments) rather than recovering individual histories.

Continuing Hammer's characteristic attention to patterns of light and shadow, *Nitrate Kisses* opens with shots of white lace; the shots are brief and are followed by a series of old photographs of Willa Cather, from the Nebraska State Historical Society. On the sound track, writer Sandy Boucher speaks: "If you begin your work and your career and your path hiding essential things, even later on it's almost impossible for them to be seen clearly." This is said in reference specifically to the life of Willa Cather, who lived with a woman for many years, and it initiates a theme which will continue throughout the rest of the film. Music from Stash Records' out-of-release *AC/DC Blues: Gay Jazz Reissues, Volume 1*, contributes to the reclaiming of lost gay culture while also adding to the sexual and celebratory energy of the film.

The images gradually segue into shots of two elderly lesbians together. The taboo of the naked older female is smashed as the women help each other undress, don safe-sex latex, and go down on each other. The images of the women are filtered through a network of shadows cast through the leaves of plants. They are filmed with an intimate camera which moves deftly around the couple, and the shots are cut quickly, with excitement and energy. The resulting scene is startling and beautiful, and it forces one to consider the relative uniformity of women filmed in erotic situations. This opening sequence is continuously intercut with shots of old dykes dancing together. The sound track consists of fragments of stories of lesbian life—going to bars, ways of dressing, being harassed.

The film continues in a similar manner with three other segments in which three couples have sex in the context of other issues. The second couple consists of two men, one black and one white, who interact behind the superimposed text of the Hayes Code. The prohibition against sexual activity and miscegenation is simultaneously mocked and reenacted as the code literally blocks, or censors, the images behind it. Hammer continues to use text throughout the film, usually in the form of intertitles. The texts are paragraphs from writings that both inspired Hammer and supplemented the personal histories by offering a broader theoretical construct against which they may be understood.

This scene is intercut with outtakes from James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber's 1930 film, *Lot in Sodom.* The exquisite black-and-white compositions, the dramatic excess, and the stylized innuendo of this first gay film in America make an excellent complement to the "present-day" footage. In this case, too, as in the first sequence, the role of history is emphatically brought to the fore. The viewer becomes the historian/archeologist and determines the relative chronology of the footage as well as the implications of the juxtapositions. For example, a shot from *Lot in Sodom* of two men wrestling cuts to one of the contemporary male couple. Hammer implies the transcendence of gay male play.

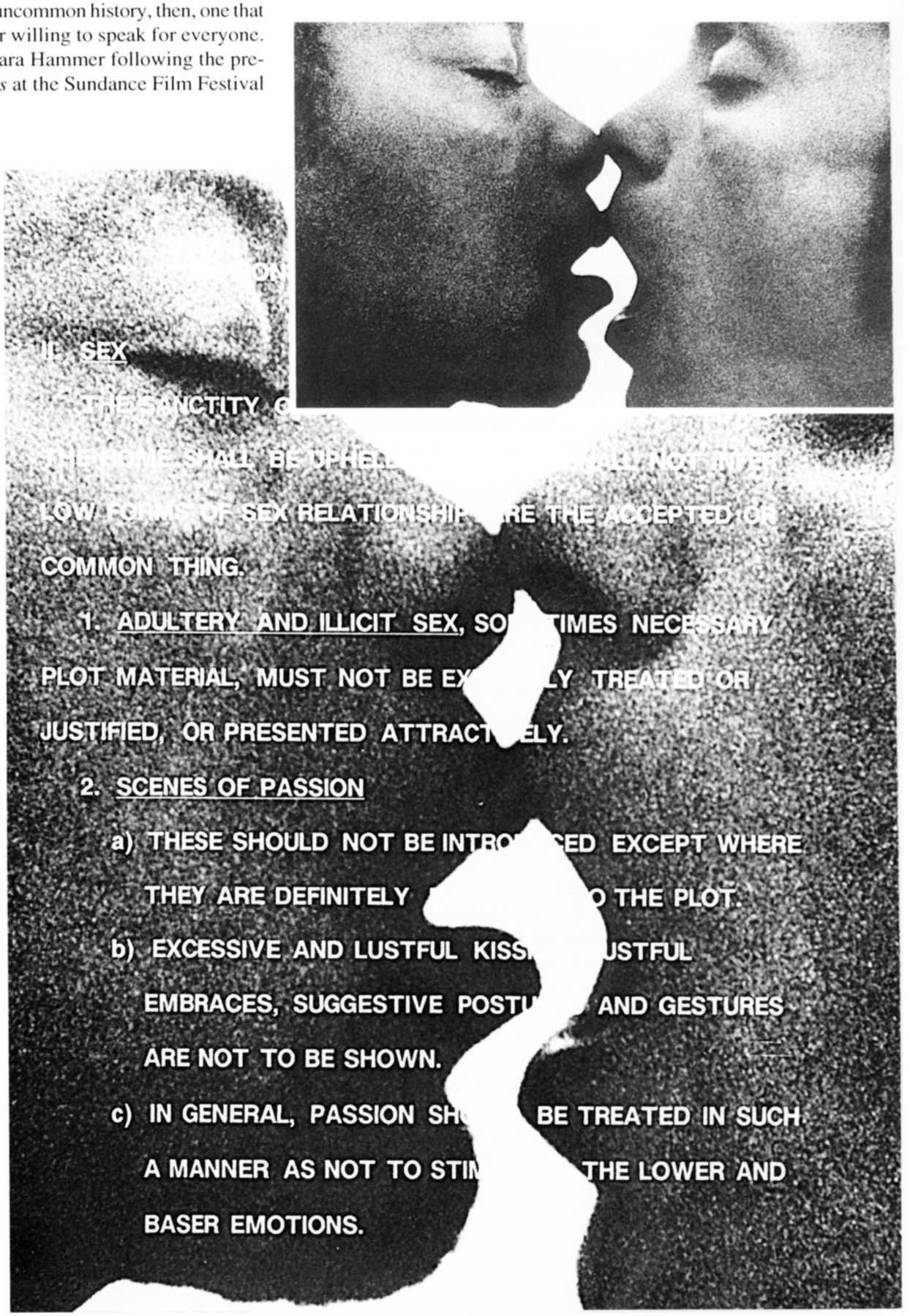
The next sequence suggests that some acts today are possible only through the battles won and lost in the past. The couple in this case are two women dressed in leather and chains. The scene is intercut with footage from the Neuengamme concentration camp. Hammer's point is perhaps strongest here as Johanna Reutter, a Hamburg-based student of cinema and history, explains that the histories of lesbian concentration-camp victims have all been told by heterosexuals. These authors barely conceal their disgust for the lesbian prisoners, and the resulting stories can only be read as partial. While Hammer does not claim to fill in the blanks or provide the real story, she does succeed in showing that the narrative thread that might link lesbians able to act out fantasies of power and submission to women who died in concentration camps has never been written.

The final sequence features two women generously tattooed and pierced. As part of the heated debate and political posturing in the "lesbian community," these two couples illustrate the very near impossibility of the term—the community is not nearly as homogeneous or harmonious as the term might imply.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault describes "common history" as the project of a power

structure that claims to speak for everyone in order to unify a disciplined and subjected society. With *Nitrate Kisses*, Barbara Hammer shows that lesbians have almost always been spoken for, when they are spoken of at all. Her film is an uncommon history, then, one that is neither complete nor willing to speak for everyone.

I spoke with Barbara Hammer following the premiere of *Nitrate Kisses* at the Sundance Film Festival in January, 1993.



Jack Waters and Peter Cramer—and the Hays Code

HOLLY WILLIS: *What was the genesis of* Nitrate Kisses*?*

BARBARA HAMMER: The genesis of *Nitrate Kisses* was twofold. One, I had already been to the Eastman House archive and had made a film called *Sanctus*, which is moving X-rays of the human body, using footage I found there: Dr. James Sibley Watson's medical outtakes from the 1950s. At the same time I had also discovered that they had 17 cans of outtakes from his *Lot in Sodom.*. They were in great condition, and I knew I should think about this for the future. I did. I wrote a grant for *Nitrate Kisses.* I used *Sanctus* as my sample, proof that I had been to the archive, proof that I had access—and I got the grant. In the meantime, ITVS [Independent Television Service] was formed. As a lesbian, I've always felt that we've been invisible and I decided that it was time for marginal people to be on broadcast television. I wrote an ITVS grant that would look at the invisible histories of gays and lesbians in the U.S. It was the largest grant that I'd written—for $60,000. I had done some extensive research, written a larger budget than I'd ever done, and I was very committed to the project. These were the two starting points.

What happened next?

After I finished the grant, I took off on a European tour. But I felt compelled to start shooting this new film right away; I couldn't just wait until I got money. I borrowed cameras, Super-8 cameras, and I found black-and-white Super-8 in three different cities, which was a very hard thing to do.

When I travel, I don't like being a tourist. I like to work. After each of my shows was over, I would stay for a few days and the people who hosted me helped me. For example, they drove me to the concentration camps. Johanna Reutter had written a paper on heterosexual accounts of lesbians in concentration camps which certainly influenced me, and I used her voice on the sound track. And Ahima Berlage, the director of a women's performance space in Berlin, took me into former East Berlin, where we tried to find the bar that the Gypsies, Jews, lesbians, and gays used to frequent during the Third Reich. I found it reconstructed in the basement of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf's museum home in the far outskirts of the city. It is Ahima's voice on the sound track that tells the sad story of denial by lesbian camp survivors today.

In Paris, I shot in the cemetery where all the famous Left Bank writers are buried—Djuna Barnes, Nathalie Barney, Janet Flanner, Gertrude and Alice—but I cut most of that out because they are so well known and the film is really about recovering the history of those who are not known. It's about ordinary lesbians—what was their cultural life like? There's a huge hole there . . . we don't have their stories.

To go back to your first question . . . I started making this film because I realized that I'm 53, I've made many films, and I'm an out lesbian, but my history could be lost. I've dedicated my life, I hope, to advancing film and lesbian studies and if *I* could be lost, what about everyone else? Who determines history is so male and so patriarchal. It's easy to pass; no one needs to know our sexual preference. Some day in the future, when we have perfect freedom, it may not be so important, but right now we have to be out politically to determine that our history can be preserved.

How did the film actually come together?

During the editing. I had the outtakes of the men from *Lot in Sodom*, and I had all this lesbian footage that I'd shot—and the footage is . . . what? Bunkers, burnt-out buildings, St. Louis demolition sites, streets in Berlin that are empty . . . vacancy . . . holes and gaps. . . . It's only the oral history that gives a personal meaning to the film, and the voices become a collected history. Some people don't understand why I didn't use sync sound. I didn't because I didn't want the film to become one person's story, but rather a collective history woven from all the voices together.

Do you think this collective voice is problematic in any way?

Yes. It can collapse difference into homogeneity and I believe I was prone to do this in the men's section, as their history is so different from ours. As a lesbian, I am more an outsider in the gay male community. Their culture and history is quite different from my own and it has innuendos and distinctions that are difficult to discern from an outsider position. Now I believe it is better to make the film that you know about, in your own community. I could take what the men told me in the interviews but I didn't have a grasp of it emotionally and physically the way I did with the women. When I edited the sections with the women, there was an interior "felt" integrity—I knew what was going on. I felt an emotional connection between picture and sound. However, even if I was constructing a disjuncture, the men's footage is more beautiful.

Why is that?

Men, traditionally, have had more money and Dr. James Sibley Watson is not the exception. The Eastman House archive has 35mm nitrate multiple takes of the

same shot in near perfect condition. I was amazed at the number of takes Dr. Watson could afford. Women, and especially lesbians, have had less money and less access to money and, therefore, to film-making. It was both a historic and aesthetic statement to shoot the women's sections in Super-8 while the men's sections originated in 35 or 16mm.

Until recently, we have had very few lesbian films. There was *Maedchen in Uniform* in 1931; we had *Dyketactics* in 1974. Is there anything before that? Or: Dorothy Arzner, will you please come out? That's the problem—there's a blank screen. But that makes it an exciting time to work, actually.

Contemporary theories of subjectivity valorize discontinuity; similarly, there is a critique of continuity in a kind of historiography that effaces gaps and links and puts causes and effects into a teleology. Both of these notions of discontinuity seem to run through Nitrate Kisses. . . .

Yes, I wanted the audience to become the historians and the archeologists. There are the strands and the threads and the fragments—or discontinuities, as you say—and the viewer must do the work and become an active participant in the cinema rather than escaping into the narrative structure of the film. So the narratives are always breaking and fragmenting even if there are stories on the tape. You become aware that this is non-illusionistic cinema and that's more of what I've been interested in. Even in *Orlando,* Sally Potter does this by having Tilda Swinton turn and speak to the audience. Break the illusion. . . . But who's to say what's true? There are so many multiplicities of truth. We make a continuity ourselves, just as in life when we walk down the street and we piece separate things together. What we make out of Park City or Sundance, for example—our experience has been so fragmented here and yet when we go home, we'll remember it and feel it as a whole. But I am also interested in trying to make experiential cinema.

What do you mean by that?

When I had my experience coming out in 1970, I touched a woman's body for the first time when we made love. All the corpuscles on my skin were highly charged by touching a body similar to my own. I think that my sight is connected to my sense of touch. It was Aldous Huxley who pointed out that children know the world through touching before they can ever see.

I began to connect touch and sight in my work in 1974. In *Dyketactics,* there are 110 shots and every shot in that four-minute film has a quality of touch in it. Western knowledge is limited by privileging sight. We are touching even when we are sleeping!

I try to make all my films experiential. If it's underwater, I take the viewer on a swim. Through the pond, down the river, into the ocean. That's in P*ond and Waterfall.*

Do you think that this experiential level is a major element of Nitrate Kisses*?*

Yes, it's there in terms of texture and camera movement, especially as the camera caresses the loving couples, but I think *Nitrate Kisses* is much more

Still from James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber's *Lot in Sodom* used in *Nitrate Kisses*

intellectual. I never felt like I worked as much with showing my research or my thinking until I got to *Nitrate Kisses.* People have laughed at me when I've said that, but I feel it's my most accomplished film and it shows all my processes. I decided not to leave the research out of the film this time. Usually I research and then go into production. The research is the preparation and the production is the result, but with *Nitrate Kisses,* I kept the quotes from the books that really influenced me and I made sure that I got them on Kodalith [a high-contrast film used mainly for titles] and shot them, because I knew if they were there to edit with, I would use them. I thought it would be another level that the film could work on. Some people feel like it breaks, but again, that's what I want to do—break the continuity that is part of commercial cinema.

At first I found the titles didactic and didn't like them, but then I decided I admired your audacity.

Well, there's a genre called the essay film, or the essayistic, which is a tradition that I was unaware of, although I admire Trinh T. Minh-ha and Yvonne Rainer's work. Their films are full of ideas, yet they're visual and they reach you on many levels and can be viewed many, many times. In fact, I would say *Reassemblage* and *Privilege* are two of my favorite films. But essayistic or not, I was a little worried about the didacticism. I felt that when you've been oppressed and you want to say something, you have to say it strong and loud, especially when you are working alone. I don't want to be subtle.

It's sort of a joke, but some people claim that pornography is the only genre that physically moves people, so I think it's great that you have made what some could construe as a "pornographic" film, but the "movement" is very different.

I'd like to say that my film is not pornographic. To me, the violence in some films is pornographic. Sexuality is like eating and sleeping and hiking, being active and taking care of ourselves in the world. It's necessary to be touched. I know how I change, the relaxation that goes into me, with sexual experience. Why do we hide it? The camera in *Nitrate Kisses* is not posed voyeuristically. It's a very intimate scene, and you feel like the cinematographer is part of this directed sexual lovemaking. I say "directed" because it looks cinéma vérité but it isn't. I know there is a discontinuity between the intimacy of the lovemaking and the abstraction of the subtitles, or the emptiness of the visuals of burnt-out homes. I knew when I viewed my footage that I had to include sexuality. It was going to make the

Frances Lorraine and Sally Binford in *Nitrate Kisses*

film. It was going to keep people with it, it was going to keep me with it, and it was going to show what we could also leave invisible.

What do you mean?

Within the lesbian communities there is a certain amount of policing and censorship and that's why I put such disparate forms of lovemaking in the film and especially why I included the S/M. A lot of women don't want to recognize S/M as a viable form of sexuality. The same is true of body decoration such as tattooing and piercing, which is very popular right now. The question is, what would *we* not look at? How might *we* censor our own history? I included forms and styles of lovemaking I felt might be excluded by our own communities today. It's not an ideal community, but then again, there aren't any, are there?

I found it interesting that after a recent screening you were called on as the representative for this disparate group called lesbians. . . .

Well, for many people outside "the community," there is a notion that there exists this united, homogeneous group. It's simply not true. It's better to speak of communit*ies*. When there have been so few lesbian film-makers, I am often expected to be a spokesperson for some mythical group. Expectations and desires of an underserved culture are projected. Perhaps I best serve the communities through teaching, where I can encourage diverse expression by young dykes.

I found your use of Foucault interesting because he is someone who has written on both history and transgression. While you reference the historiographical material, I wondered if you were familiar with A Preface to Transgression*?*

No, I'm not, although I am currently reading two books on transgression—*The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, and *Transgressions of Reading: Narrative Engagement as Exile and Return,* by Robert D. Newman. I tried to start a reading group to discuss these things—it's so hard once you're out of school!

So didactic or not, your referencing of this material outside an academic institution is interesting in and of itself.

I find the preproduction study and research as exciting and rewarding as the production aspect of media. I studied the Western constructions of death for *Vital Signs,* for example. Death is a state I've been trained to fear. I found that the medieval reception of those who died was more familiar that what we have today. People were buried right next to their homes. Their presence was a part of life. After the cities became walled, cemeteries were put on the outside. We've put death far out of our minds. We've tried to forget those who have died. But now, certainly there is a new community that says, "We want to remember." We want to know our history. We are interested again in keeping the dead near by, and embracing them.

How do you respond to the charge that avant-garde work is elitist?

There is recent avant-garde film that tries to be accessible, and there are disruptive strategies that work. Look at film-makers like Peggy Ahwesh and Su Friedrich. Leslie Thornton kicks the tripod that her camera is on to make a disruption. Disruptions challenge assumptions. There's nothing elitist about being a bad girl. Also, video and film artists work with images from popular culture or incorporate the news and print media into their work, so I think it's more a problem of distribution that keeps us separated or makes the work "elitist." And what if we didn't have an avant-garde? Would we just clone films year after year?

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Nitrate Kisses is available through Strand Releasing in Los Angeles; some of Barbara Hammer's other films are available from Women Make Movies, in New York City.

Judith Sanders
and *Daniel Lieberfeld*

Dreaming in Pictures

The Childhood Origins of Buster Keaton's Creativity

Buster Keaton, the silent comedian who never smiled, remains an enigma still today. James Agee detected a "freezing whisper . . . of melancholia" blowing through Keaton's work, but did not probe for its sources. Psychologist Alice Miller went further. In a brief essay, she linked the traumas of Keaton's upbringing with his low-affect comic persona. Miller's insights provide a starting point for a detailed exploration of Keaton's unique comic vision. We believe that what distinguishes Keaton's work is its use of vaudeville convention as a vehicle for expressing, and attempting to resolve, psychological dilemmas rooted in Keaton's personal history. Our approach has two basic premises: first, that adults' personal struggles are often traceable to childhood traumas, the emotions of which have been repressed. Second, as detailed by Miller, that artists frequently use their art to recreate their emotional histories without being aware that they are doing so.

Keaton himself was apparently unaware of the autobiographical dimension of his work, although he recognized that his films originated in fantasy. He observed, "I used to daydream an awful lot in pictures.

The Three Keatons: Joe, Myra, and Buster (opposite page); Buster Keaton in *The General* (right)

I could get carried away and visualize all the fairylands in the world. Dream sequences . . . I guess it was just my natural way of working." (Dardis, 130) Keaton's dreams and fantasies, which he put to good artistic use, also functioned psychologically. During his career as a director, Keaton was able to represent his emotional struggles through fantasies in film, thereby moderating for a time the debilitating consequences of his extraordinary childhood.

Biographers paint Keaton's childhood in sunny colors. His parents were entertainers who traveled the vaudeville circuit. Offstage they played cards and practical jokes, and told wild stories in the company of some of America's most talented performers. (One of them, Harry Houdini, was Buster's godfather.) Buster joined his parents onstage when he was only three. Within a few years he was something of a star. He never had to go to school—or rather, he went once, broke up the class with his one-liners, and was expelled. Every night he and his father improvised slapstick routines while his mother played the saxophone. Audiences rewarded him with laughter and applause.

Keaton biographer Rudi Blesh enthuses that Buster "loved the roughness, loved the stage, loved his parents." (38) Daniel Moews calls Buster's "one of history's most agreeable childhoods." (vii) And Keaton himself writes that he grew up "surrounded by people who loved fun and knew how to create it." He calls his parents his "first piece of great good luck." (1960, 13-14)

But there was a darker side to Keaton's childhood, which biographers and Keaton himself underplay, but which is nevertheless well documented by these same authors. Keaton's father was an alcoholic who beat him both onstage and off. Judging from Keaton's later life and his own alcoholism and isolation, his father's violent treatment left Keaton with emotional wounds that never healed. According to his third wife, Keaton harbored "depths of sadness . . . that love would never reach again." (Blesh, 348) Yet he continued to idealize his father and deny the harm he had caused. With his emotional responses as inert as his comic face, Keaton was able to express his hurt and anger only in cinematic disguises.

Keaton was born in 1895 while his parents, Joe and Myra, were on the road with the Mohawk Indian Medicine Company. His parents named him Joseph after his father and called him "Little Joe." In his autobiography, Keaton recounts that while his parents

were busy performing, he often got into trouble. Part of his finger was amputated after getting caught in a clothes wringer; he tumbled down a long flight of stairs, earning the nickname "Buster"; a cyclone even sucked him out of a second-story window. His parents decided to take him onstage where they could keep an eye on him. They dressed him in a tiny copy of his father's clown getup, including oversized slapshoes, a baggy suit, and a red wig. Three-year-old Buster stood at the back of the stage during his father's routines and, to audiences' delight, mimicked his every move. A theater owner offered Joe Keaton ten dollars extra per week if Buster would appear in every show.

The Three Keatons thereafter featured Joe and Buster's slapstick improvisations on the emotionally charged theme of a naughty boy and his enraged father. As Joe lectured the audience on the importance of "making children mind," Buster would knock off his father's hat with a basketball. Joe had to teach the bad boy a lesson. He would grab Buster by a valise handle that Myra had sewn into his costume and heave him across the stage. In another routine, Joe tried to sing as Buster swatted him with a broom. Joe would retaliate by flinging Buster through the backdrop. Advertisements promoted Buster as "The Human Mop" because Joe often swabbed the stage with his son's body.

The Three Keatons' roughhousing attracted large audiences, but it also drew protests that Buster was being mistreated. The Gerry Society, formed to enforce child labor laws, had the Keatons banned in several cities, including New York. The family worked briefly in England, where audiences were shocked by the act's violence. An English theater owner declared that Buster must have been adopted, because no father would treat his own flesh and blood the way Joe treated Buster.

Although Buster became an adept tumbler who took most falls in stride, there were many accidents. One of Joe's signature high kicks knocked Buster unconscious for 18 hours. On another occasion, Joe heaved Buster into a backdrop that happened to be covering a brick wall.

It was during these early, knockabout performances that Buster learned not to smile. In his autobiography Keaton claims that he developed his trademark "stone face" while still a small boy, purely as a comic technique. "One of the first things I noticed," he writes, "was that whenever I smiled or let the audience suspect how much I was enjoying myself, they didn't seem to laugh as much as usual." (1960, 13) Later he credits the stone face to his father's insistent training:

> If something tickled me and I started to grin, the old man would hiss, "Face, face!" That meant freeze the puss. The longer I held it, why if we got a laugh, the blank pan or the puzzled puss would double it. He kept after me, never let up, and in a few years it was automatic. Then when I'd step on stage or in front of a camera, I *couldn't* smile. Still can't. (Blesh, 38)

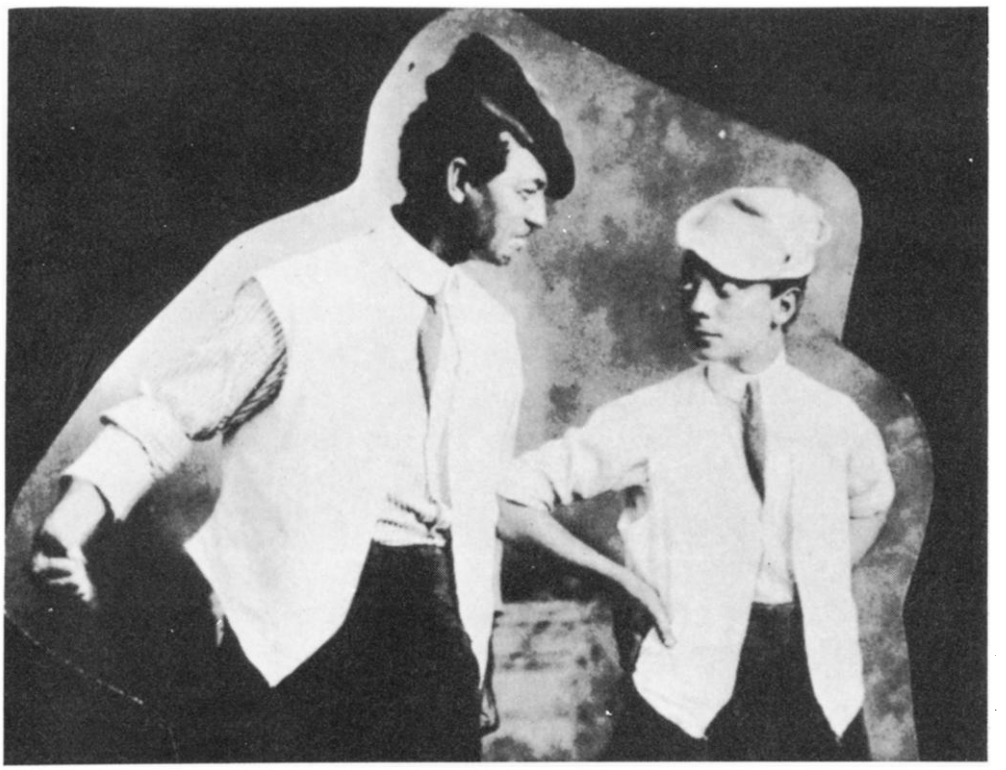
In an article entitled "Why I Never Smile," Keaton explained just how his father "kept after" him: If Buster showed any expression whatever, his father's "next hit would be a good deal harder. . . . I could not even whimper." Here Keaton reveals that the real risk was that he might betray not how much he was enjoying himself, but how frightened he felt.

Buster's true feelings about his father's training emerge even as he excuses him by claiming that "it was *on purpose* that I started looking *miserable, humiliated, hounded, and haunted, bedeviled, bewildered, and at my wit's end.*" (1960, 13, italics added) The list is an expert's inventory. Had Keaton not felt these very emotions, he could probably not have detailed them so thoroughly.

It is ironic that Keaton's expression, which most critics characterized as blank, was actually his means of indicating his interior reality. What Edmund Wilson accurately described as Keaton's "sullen and sensitive face" is the face of the boy who has been beaten, whose hurt and defensiveness are palpable, but who still dares to hope that someone might love him. Early candid photographs, in which Buster's handsome face is caught in sullen misery, confirm this view. But the most powerful indications of the emotions only half-hidden by the "stone face" can be found in the events of Keaton's later life, and the dream-like distillations of his childhood that suffuse his films.

As Buster's talents grew, he became The Three Keatons' star and the family's breadwinner. Joe recouped his injured self-esteem by continuing to bully the small rival who had upstaged him. Joe also drank heavily and when drunk, became obnoxious and violent. Louise, Buster's younger sister, recalled Joe's "habit of taking it out on Buster." Buster Collier, a family friend, was more blunt, calling Joe "a living horror" whom his son "learned to endure." (Dardis, 49, 23)

Keaton recalled that his intoxicated father would "come onto the stage wild. That's when I had to fasten a rubber rope onto that old basketball of mine and keep



Joe Keaton and
Buster, 1911–1912

swinging it around like a hammer thrower to keep him off me. . . . There were times when it was him or me, but we had to keep it funny." Buster recalled Joe being

> mad most of the time, and [he] could look at you as if he didn't know you. . . . [T]hose lickings onstage for the things that had happened before. No more private spankings. In front of a thousand people. Finally I'd get sore and we'd start trading. And still keep it funny. Funny? People should have felt the wallops we were handing out. (Blesh, 80–81)

Judging from his filmed depictions of fights with male authority figures, striking back at his father, even in self-defense, filled Buster with guilt and fear of reprisal. But in his autobiography Keaton excuses his father's violence and blames himself:

> After I was seven, Pop would punish me for misbehaving while we were working on the stage. He knew I was too proud of being able to take it to yell or cry. *I don't think my father had an ounce of cruelty in him.* He just didn't think it was good for a boy as full of beans as I was to get away with too much. And nothing that I have observed since gives me reason to think he was wrong. (14, italics added)

Neither Buster nor his biographers give evidence of any egregious misbehavior on Buster's part, but to acknowledge that his father cared so little about him that he could mistreat him for selfish reasons would have made Buster feel unbearably vulnerable and alone.

It is hard to know how Myra Keaton responded to her husband's abuse of their son: Keaton's biographers say little about her, except to note that she was a whisky drinker and a nonstop talker. Myra was small: 4' 11" and 90 pounds. Her size is the first thing that Keaton mentions about her in his autobiography. Myra was also ten years younger than Joe (she was 18 when Buster was born) and may not have felt that she had the physical strength or authority to challenge him.

Myra apparently reinforced the climate of denial surrounding Joe's violence toward Buster. According to Blesh, when Buster was 20, Myra told him, "Joe's not punishing you." "It feels like it," Buster replied. But Myra insisted, "No, he's not mad at you or anyone else. It's Old Father Time he'd like to get his hands on. . . . Some can take getting old, some can't." (80–81)

Joe's drinking and his feud with a powerful theater owner got The Three Keatons exiled to the vaudeville hinterlands. The act began to fall apart, and so did the family. "I don't know how we lasted as long as we did," Keaton later reflected. "Finally . . . Myra decided to call it quits. Joe was abusing her too. . . . She said to me, 'Buster, God help me, I can't take any more.'"[1]

Steamboat Bill, Jr.

In 1917, when The Three Keatons were in Los Angeles, Buster and Myra decided to abandon Joe. It was the beginning of the end of Joe and Myra's marriage, and the moment when Buster struck out on his own. He was 21 years old. "I can still hardly believe we did it," Keaton marveled. "Except for Myra, I guess I'd have gone on taking it."

Soon after leaving his parents, Keaton apprenticed himself to Fatty Arbuckle. The two collaborated on 15 short films that showed so much promise that Arbuckle's producer, Joseph Schenck, established Keaton in a film studio of his own. Between 1920 and 1923, Keaton cranked out 19 of his own meticulous and inspired two-reelers. In 1924, he switched to features because they could make more money. The next four years were Keaton's most creative. He wrote, directed, and starred in 11 features, including such classics as *Sherlock, Jr.* (1924), *The Navigator* (1924), *The General* (1926), and *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928).

Keaton worked in his film studio as he had worked in vaudeville, by improvising gags. He would send for props—a hot-air balloon, a cow, even an abandoned ocean liner—and play around to uncover their comic possibilities. This free-associative method was probably central to Keaton's creative process: spontaneity would have helped him bypass the inhibitions that production methods requiring more preplanning would have imposed.

Keaton also thrived on risky stunts. Heart-stopping leaps and falls punctuate his intensely physical films. He could have hired stunt men, but he preferred to take the risks himself. There were injuries here, as there had been on stage. He broke his neck filming *Sherlock, Jr.*, and nearly drowned several times while filming *Our Hospitality*. He later claimed to have broken every bone in his body, one at a time.

Keaton's stunts could well have served psychological needs as well as artistic ones. They may have allowed him to recreate the physical dangers of his childhood, this time under circumstances of his own choosing. His father's daily beatings probably taught him that he had to submit to physical pain to win praise. But Keaton, according to Buster Collier, "could never say he was hurt. . . . It was impossible for [him] to express any sort of pain at any time." (Dardis, 145–46) Through physically punishing stunts, Buster continued to prove to Joe how much he could take while still "freezing the puss."

By 1925, Keaton was earning nearly a quarter of a million dollars a year. He had married Joe Schenck's sister-in-law, Natalie Talmadge, in 1921. Keaton's success and links with the Talmadge clan boosted him into the ranks of Hollywood royalty, on a par with Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. His star continued to rise until 1926, when *The General*, the film he considered his masterpiece, was panned by critics and failed to earn back its high production costs. Keaton's next two features were unprofitable as well.[2] Convinced that production costs were too high (and getting higher due to the introduction of sound), Schenck decided to abandon independent studio production. In 1928 he dissolved Keaton's studio and pressured him to sign with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, a move Keaton later called the biggest mistake of his life.

Keaton kept artistic control over his first MGM feature, *The Cameraman* (1928), which proved to be a critical and financial success. But subsequently, MGM executives tried to make him to stick to scripts and budgets that precluded improvisation, and studio rules kept stars from performing their own stunts. It may have been because of such frustrating limitations that Keaton named his bungalow on the MGM lot "Keaton's Kennel."

MGM's controls deprived Keaton of the creative improvisation that had allowed him to release buried sadness and anger rooted in childhood trauma. Most of the tragedies in his adult life occurred when his predisposition toward depression and self-destruction was triggered by the loss of film-making, his sole emotional outlet. Keaton had long been a heavy social drinker with an uncanny capacity for liquor; now he emulated his father by becoming an alcoholic. He drank throughout the day, even when alone. [3]

One evening in 1928, while preparing his second feature at MGM, Keaton invited his friends Collier and Louise Brooks to the Kennel. All had been drinking heavily. Keaton picked up a baseball bat and, without a word, smashed each pane of the glass cabinets that lined the bungalow's living room. Brooks interpreted his action as an inchoate expression of frustration with MGM, and as an attempt to "break out of his cage, escape to creation." But, Brooks observed, "he never made it. He had lost his magic power over booze." (Dardis, 169)

At the same time Keaton's marriage began to collapse. After his 1932 divorce, Keaton, despite visitation rights, never saw his two sons until one sought him out many years later.

By the early 1930s, Keaton was going on drinking binges of several days and was subject to memory loss and blackouts. Once he was arrested for shooting up an Arizona town at two in the morning. (Dardis, 219) Keaton hit bottom late in 1932. He woke up after a drinking binge to find himself in Mexico City next to a practical nurse and sometime prostitute who had evidently—Keaton could not remember how—become his second wife. (Dardis, 232; Blesh, 337) The same year, MGM fired him for unreliability caused by his alcoholism. Although Keaton's second marriage lasted until 1936, he was in an alcoholic haze most of the time and could recall little about it. Pictures of him from this period show a sick wreck of a man.

Trained never to react to his father's blows, Keaton had difficulty fending off any blows dealt him: he seems neither to have contested Schenck's decision to dissolve his studio nor to have tried to resolve his differences with Natalie. His crippling incapacity to recognize or express his emotional needs also kept him from taking solace in friends.

In 1940, at age 44, Keaton married again. His third wife, Eleanor Norris, a 21-year-old actress, was affectionate and supportive, and with her as his sorely needed caretaker, Keaton began to piece his life back together. He accepted dozens of minor film roles over the next decade.[4] But the self-destructive behavior continued: there were sporadic alcoholic rages and blackouts, and self-inflicted injuries. He smoked three to four packs of cigarettes a day.

In the late 1950s, film critics began to revive interest in Keaton's largely forgotten work. International appreciation culminated with a jubilant homage at the Venice Film Festival in 1965. Keaton accepted roles in films ranging from *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* to *Film* (written by his great admirer Samuel Beckett).

Keaton died of lung cancer in 1966. A few years before, he had summed up his feelings about his life:

> Because of the way I looked on the stage and screen the public naturally assumed that I felt hopeless and unloved in my personal life. Nothing could be farther from the fact. As long back as I can remember I have considered myself a fabulously lucky man. . . . I've had few dull moments and not too many sad and defeated ones.
>
> In saying this I am by no means overlooking the rough and rocky years I've lived through. But I was not brought up thinking life would be easy. . . . And the bad years, it seems to me, were so few that only a dyed-in-the-wool grouch who enjoyed feeling sorry for himself would complain of them. (1960, 13–14)

The passage reads like Keaton's attempt to convince someone—perhaps himself—that his had been a happy life. But at the time that Keaton wrote it, he was, according to his friend and distributor Raymond Rohauer, an embittered recluse. While Keaton's life certainly included periods when he felt "fabulously lucky," his evaluation seems to bury his personal unhappiness.

In his films, Keaton usually cast himself as a lonely youth adrift in a coarse and uncomprehending world. Keaton's hapless heroes struggle to earn the approval of scornful, threatening men and the love of distracted, ineffectual women. Despite their incredible exertions, these "heroes" are humiliated and hounded as they strive for scraps of intimacy and affection. Even their last-minute triumphs are tinged with a gentle irony.

Key themes from Keaton's childhood emerge distinctly in his earliest comedies. In his 1920 two-reeler *Convict 13*, Buster is brained by a ball during a game of golf. While he lies unconscious, an escaped convict swaps clothes with him. Buster awakes and is chased by the police, who drag him off to prison to be hanged. He awaits death on a stage-like gallows, a noose draped around his neck. He has been dressed in a disturbingly outsized striped prison suit (reminiscent of the grown-ups' costumes that Myra had dressed him in). In front of him, happy spectators stuff themselves with popcorn.

The warden's daughter rescues him from the gallows and Buster disguises himself in a guard's outfit. During a prison riot, a giant inmate takes him for a guard and attacks him. The giant also kidnaps the warden's daughter. Buster catches the giant's hand in a large paper press but his powerful adversary simply waves it like a club. Buster fends the giant off by swinging a punching bag tied to the end of a rope (much as he fended off his drunken father with a basketball). The giant, unstoppable, advances on Buster and is about to kill him with his bare hands. Then Buster wakes up on the golf course. He is safe in the arms of a female player who resembles the warden's daughter.

The unlucky Convict 13 is trapped in a nightmare of inexplicable persecution, condemned for crimes he never committed. He does not even know what they are. Similarly, Joe attacked Buster for no discernible reason. By childish logic, the boy may have concluded that his father mistook him for somebody else who really deserved to be punished.

Convict 13: awaiting death on a stage-like gallows

The scene of the hanging recalls the vaudeville stage where Buster and his father traded blows each night. The guffaws of the vulgar mob, for whom his execution provides entertainment, echo those of the vaudeville audiences for whom Buster's punishment provided amusement.

In the film, Buster is innocently playing when a blow knocks him unconscious, as his father's blows disrupted Keaton's childhood. The blow thus derives as much from actual events as from vaudeville or slapstick convention. From Buster's perspective, his father would have seemed like a dangerously out-of-control giant, strong enough to lift a paper press (reminiscent of the clothes wringer that entrapped Buster's hand when he was a baby) and wave it around like a club.

Keaton's father plays one of the rioting prisoners in the film. Buster and Joe were reunited after Buster had established himself, and Keaton frequently cast Joe in the role of a disparaging, punitive father or father-in-law, notably in the shorts *The Scarecrow, Neighbors,* and *Day Dreams,* and in the feature *Sherlock, Jr.* In *Convict 13,* Joe's character knocks three fellow prisoners unconscious with a high kick.

Buster's only protector, the warden's daughter, has some influence with the warden, the man who dispenses and rescinds punishment. She is responsible for Buster's reprieve. But like Myra Keaton, she too is ultimately helpless against the raging giant.

While the dream sequence initiated by the knock-out blow represents the waking reality of Buster's early life, the "real" sequences on the golf course reflect young Buster's dreams or wishes. In the film Buster "wakes up" in the arms of a woman who comforts him by cradling him like a baby. Since Keaton's real mother did not protect him from his father's violent rages, only in dreams could Keaton enjoy the affection, security, and carefree play that he imagines here.

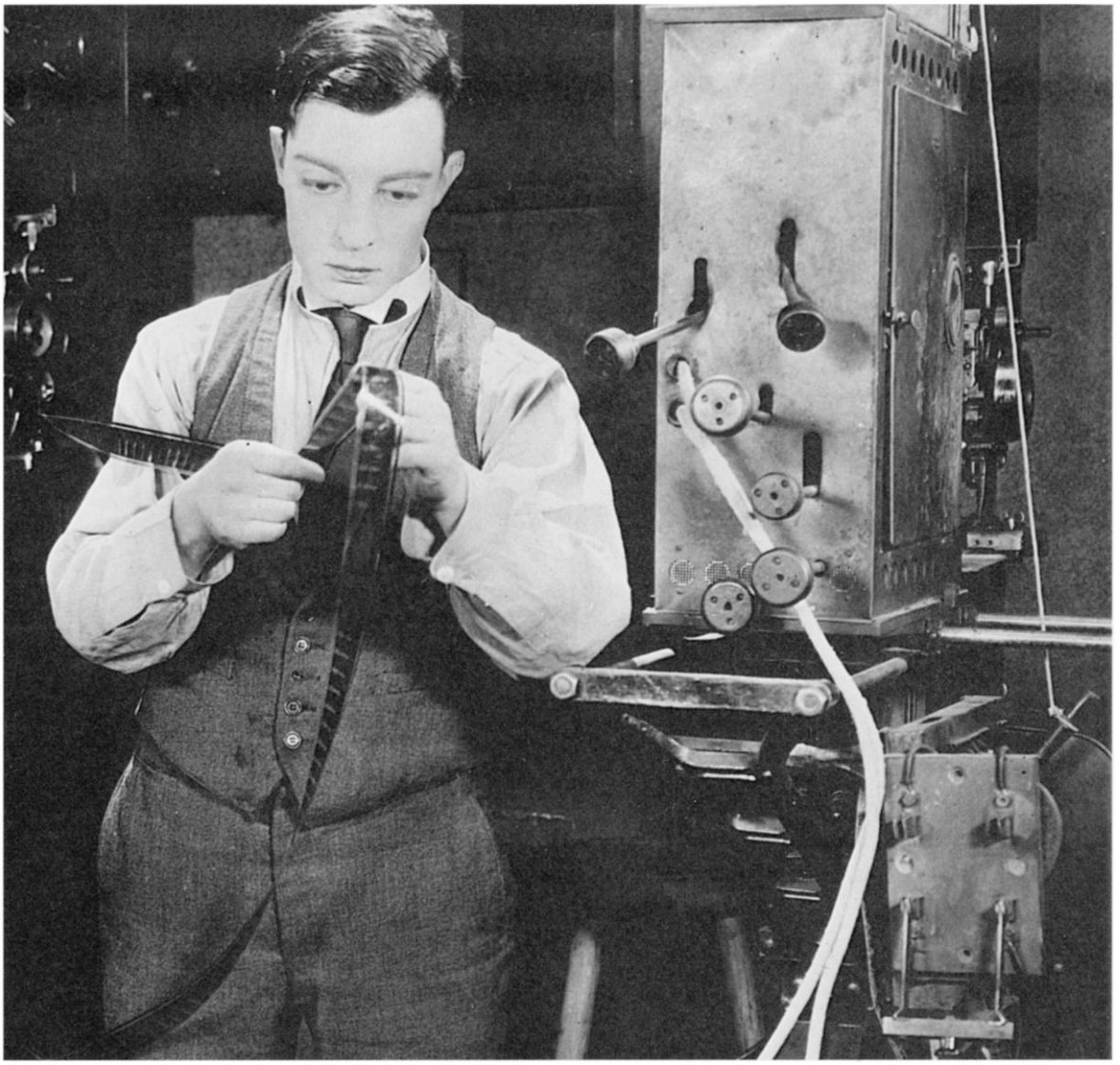
The surreal events of *Convict 13* depict Buster as an innocent who is wrongly punished for unknowable crimes. Later, in *Cops,* one of Keaton's best-known two-reelers, Keaton develops another scenario around the same theme. This time, however, he includes a coded explanation for his punishment.

In *Cops* (1922), Buster's girl notifies him that she will not marry him until he becomes "a big businessman." He marches off to please her, but gets trapped in a maze of misunderstandings. A con man sells him someone else's furniture. Buster loads it onto a wagon that he mistakenly believes he has paid for. He constructs a turn indicator out of a boxing glove and tie rack and unknowingly manages to punch out a cop with it. His wagon winds up in the middle of the Policemen's Day Parade. When an anarchist's bomb lands beside him, Buster uses the fuse to light a cigarette. He then blithely tosses the mysterious object near the reviewing stand, where it explodes. The policemen and crowd blame Buster, and soon every cop in the city is chasing him. Buster ducks into a building which, unfortunately, turns out to be a police station, and hundreds of angry cops pour in behind him. A moment later, a figure in a policeman's outfit emerges. It is Buster. He carefully locks the front door and throws away the key. Just then his girlfriend happens by. She spurns him and walks off. Buster retrieves the key and unlocks the stationhouse door. Uniformed arms seize him and yank him inside. The scene dissolves to an image of Buster's hat atop a tombstone engraved "The End."

Cops may be understood as the fantasy of a child consumed with guilt over his angry feelings toward an abusive parent. In the film, it is Buster's unconscious destructive urges that get him in trouble. He punches out one cop, blows up others, and takes another's furniture—all without really meaning to. Freud observes in *Jokes and the Unconscious* that humor often expresses forbidden impulses, usually aggressive ones. *Cops* shows us a version of the secret, parricidal rage Keaton felt in response to his father's abuse. Under the cover of humor, Keaton's film allows him to protest his treatment as a child, blast the audiences who laughed at his suffering (the crowd on the reviewing stand is scattered by the bomb he tosses), and decry his mother's obliviousness by making the sole female character a self-absorbed fool.

In *Cops* and *Convict 13*, as in Keaton's own childhood, Buster has no hope of either pacifying his tormentors or escaping them. By the end of *Cops*, he despairs of finding sympathy and understanding from even one human being. Rejected by the woman whose love he has struggled to earn, he allows himself to be annihilated. The film's final image of the tombstone with Keaton's flattened porkpie on it could be interpreted as a metaphorical self-portrait. In a sense, the film has explained how inescapable punishment for expressions of feeling turned Keaton into a stone face.

In *Cops,* the father-figure is refracted into a horde of vengeful policemen who punish Buster for his uncontrolled aggression. Not all Keaton's film fantasies end so bleakly. In *Sherlock, Jr.*, for example, although Buster is again accused of a crime he didn't commit, he invents a powerful alter ego who enables him to fulfill his deep wish for vindication and forgiveness.



Projecting dreams: *Sherlock, Jr.*

In the surreal tour-de-force *Sherlock, Jr.*, Buster is accused of stealing his fiancée's father's watch.[5] Although he has actually been framed by an older rival, he is ejected from his fiancée's house in disgrace.[6] Buster returns to his job as the projectionist at a movie theater. While projecting a melodrama entitled *Hearts and Pearls*, he falls asleep. In his dream, Buster steps into the film on the screen and the action begins to parallel the scene at his fiancée's house. But in this fantasy version, Buster has been transformed into Sherlock, Jr., master detective. This extra-competent alter ego eludes the deadly traps the villains set for him, rescues the heroine, and catches the thieves.

Meanwhile, the fiancée's family has learned the truth about the watch theft. She comes to the projection booth to beg Buster's forgiveness. "Father sent me to tell you that we've made a terrible mistake," she tells him tenderly. These are the very words that Buster as a boy must have longed to hear. The ending is particularly poignant given that Keaton's real father plays the forgiving father in the film.

Keaton invests *Sherlock, Jr.*, with a rich depiction of his own creative process. As a film-maker, Keaton is like the projectionist who enters into his own film fantasies in order to resolve the disturbing mysteries that elude him in real life. In *Sherlock, Jr.*, the film and dream become one. Likewise, the films Keaton made functioned as dreams wherein he could express disturbing memories and emotions in relatively safe, unconscious forms. The action in *Hearts and Pearls*,

the film-within-the-film, is closely linked to the frame story of *Sherlock, Jr.* In the same way, the stories contained in Keaton's dream-films reflect the events in his life.

These three early "crime" films trace the evolution of Keaton's attempts to answer the central dilemma of his childhood: Why was his father mistreating him? In *Convict 13* he is innocent; in *Cops* he concludes that he must have been guilty of unleashing his anger; by *Sherlock, Jr.*, he can imagine a miraculous acquittal. With its presentation of vindication and resolution, *Sherlock, Jr.*, marks a turning point. From here on, Keaton's films take on the problem of masculine identity.

In the features *Battling Butler* (1926) and *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, Keaton plays a passive, somewhat effeminate son struggling to prove his masculinity to his father. In the first film, Keaton plays the wealthy, spoiled Alfy Butler. Alfy's father calls him a weakling and suggests he go on a hunting trip to develop his manhood. Alfy complies, but brings along his valet and a Rolls Royce with attached trailer. In the woods, Alfy falls in love with Sally, a country girl, but her brawny father and brother think him a contemptible jellyfish. To impress them, Alfy impersonates a prizefighter, Alfred "Battling" Butler, who happens to share Alfy's name. The ruse works, and Alfy marries Sally.

Alfy must then keep up the deception and prepare for a boxing match. He drives to the real Battling Butler's training camp. On his way, he stops to give Battling's wife a ride; the boxer finds out and becomes jealous. Battling agrees not to reveal the secret of Alfy's identity on the condition that Alfy fight a match with the Alabama Murderer. "That will teach him," he sneers, "to flirt with another man's wife." At the training camp Alfy is subjected to a stream of comic humiliations that put him in the position of a mistreated child. He is dressed in oversized clothes and manhandled by a towering trainer. He conclusively demonstrates his incompetence at all aspects of boxing and is mauled by larger, more expert sparring partners.

The dreaded day arrives when Alfy must fight the Alabama Murderer, but Battling knocks him out, snarling that all along he's been planning on punishing Alfy himself. Sally's family has bet everything they have on Alfy (as the Keaton family counted on Buster's performances for its livelihood). Battling punishes Alfy savagely. Then Alfy catches sight of Sally. Inspired, he works himself up into a blind rage and smashes his tormentor unconscious. Afterward, Alfy confesses to Sally, "I lied. I'm not even a fighter." "I'm glad," she tells him.[7]

Through this fantasy of humiliation and revenge, Keaton indicates how badly his male self-confidence was crippled by his father's bullying. Despite his mild nature, Alfy is coerced, as was Buster, into a lopsided combat from which he has little chance of emerging whole. Alfy unwittingly incurs the jealousy of the powerful Battling, who suspects him of trying to seduce his wife. Similarly, Joe seems to have envied Buster's youth and talents, and perhaps his relationship with Myra as well. Alfy is mauled by the larger, more powerful male (who, like Joe, happens to share the younger man's name). Alfy is humiliated in front of an audience and the woman he loves. The boxing ring in *Battling Butler*, like the gallows in *Convict 13*, recalls the vaudeville stage where sport and entertainment degenerated into a nightmarish showdown and where, Buster remembered, " . . . it was him or me."

In the film's wishful recasting of these traumatic experiences, Alfy miraculously triumphs over his tormentor. In so doing, he fulfills Keaton's repressed childhood desire to smash his father into the ground. And, further, with impeccable Oedipal logic, Butler/Buster, having won the father/son competition, now gets the girl. But Sally, unlike Keaton's parents, will not require him to be a human punching bag; she will accept him for the gentle, sensitive person he is.

The size difference between Keaton and his father could well have deepened Buster's anxiety about his masculinity (even when fully grown, Buster was only 5' 4" while Joe Keaton was 5' 11"). Masculine angst is a staple among comedians of slight stature, from Chaplin to Woody Allen, but in Keaton's case, Joe's aggressive bullying would have exacerbated his short son's insecurity.

The theme of *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, is Junior's struggle to win approval from his brawny, nasty-tempered father, a riverboat captain named Steamboat Bill. The film begins with Junior (played by Keaton) returning home after several years away at school in Boston. Steamboat Bill eagerly anticipates meeting his son: "I bet he's bigger'n me now." What he and his shipmate find at the railway station is an absurd little fop sporting a blazer, a tiny mustache, and a ridiculous beret, and toting a ukulele. The father cannot contain his disappointment. His son's effeminacy threatens his own manhood. When Junior soothes a baby by skipping and playing his ukulele, Bill fumes at his shipmate, "If you say what you're thinking, I'll strangle you."

The father then attempts to remake his son's image. He smashes Junior's ukulele, shoves him into a hat store to replace his beret, and drags him into a barbershop to get the "barnacle" shaved off his lip. When Junior meets Marion, a friend from college, there is a spark of romance, but Marion turns out to be the daughter of the wealthy John J. King, Bill's archrival on the river. King notices Junior and smirks, "Is *that* Steamboat Bill, Jr.?" Bill, deeply embarrassed, yanks his son away. Both fathers forbid their children to see each other.

Throughout the film, Junior suffers a series of injuries and humiliations typical of childhood. He trips and slips, falls in the river, and bumps his head. His father bullies him unfeelingly. At one point he has to put on his father's ridiculously oversized clothes.

But throughout his trials, Junior retains a measure of individuality by defying his father. He hangs on to the beret his father wants him to jettison; he buys a swank admiral's outfit instead of the plain work clothes his father chooses (this prompts Bill's shipmate to suggest that no jury would convict Bill if he shot his son)[8]; and he sneaks out to visit Marion in spite of Bill's prohibition. The next day, Bill hands his disobedient son a ticket back to Boston. Then Bill discovers that King has had Bill's boat, the Stonewall Jackson, condemned. Bill fights with King and is arrested and thrown in jail.

When Junior learns of Bill's predicament, he decides to stay. He visits Bill in jail, but his father cannot tolerate him even there. Trying to arrange a jailbreak, Junior is knocked unconscious by the sheriff. When Junior wakes in the hospital, a cyclone hits the town, blowing it apart and flooding it. Junior's bed flies out of the hospital with Junior still in it. He wanders the town's deserted streets, narrowly avoiding collapsing buildings and flying debris. At one point he finds himself backstage in a theater, where he is unnerved by a ventriloquist's dummy. Other props seem to leer and pounce at him (perhaps echoing frightening memories of theaters Keaton performed in as a child).

The cyclone blows Junior into the river. He crawls aboard the unmoored Stonewall Jackson and maneuvers it to save Marion from drowning. Meanwhile, the jail is sliding into the water and Steamboat Bill is about to drown. Junior rams the sinking jail with the boat, freeing his father. He also saves Marion's father. Marion hugs Junior, who dives into the river and retrieves a preacher to marry them.

Steamboat Bill rejects his son for being less than a real man, yet at the same time he squelches Junior's attempts to assert his masculinity. He forces Junior to have his fledgling mustache shaved off and forbids him to court Marion—the rival's daughter who herself is Bill's rival for Junior's loyalty. The creator of this film-fantasy takes revenge on the emasculating father. He condemns Bill's boat, the emblem of his status and potency, and has him jailed for fighting (something that occasionally happened to Joe). It is as if Keaton is imagining what it would be like if his punishing father were rendered helpless and he could unleash the cyclone of his anger.

But the cyclone destroys everything: revenge brings not release but loneliness and regret. With Bill jailed, Junior is left unprotected. He is assaulted and injured and has to go to the hospital. Without his father, the world becomes eerie and desolate. Here Keaton builds on early childhood memories of frightening times without his parents—an accident when he was abandoned backstage and the cyclone that carried him out of the hotel room in which he had been left by himself—to imagine what might happen if his angry wish to obliterate his father were ever realized.

To feel safe and to end the loneliness he has to bring his father back. It is perhaps out of a desire not merely for revenge but ultimately for reconciliation that Junior rescues his father from prison and death, despite Bill's abusiveness. In the process, Junior becomes a man. At the end, he fishes all the elements of his world out of the river, and rearranges them to his liking. The fantasy vehicle permits Keaton to fulfill concurrent desires to humble his father, forgive him, and gain his approval as well.

In Keaton's most fully realized films, *The General* and *The Cameraman*, his narrative technique became more sophisticated. These films are less surreal, and the incidents less obviously drawn from Keaton's childhood. He dispenses with the device of the dream, and creates detailed and complex fictional worlds. In these films, Buster strives to become a competent, worthy man—one who has mastered a trade and won the love of a woman. He has mixed success; only accidentally does he win the love and validation that he craves. Moreover, the major psychological themes persist. Buster is surrounded by danger; he remains terribly lonely; he is still humiliated by scornful males; and he struggles to earn the love and protection of appealing but distracted women.

The General is set in Georgia during the Civil War. Keaton plays Johnnie Gray, a young railway engineer devoted to his locomotive called the General, as well as to his sweetheart, Annabelle. When war comes,

Annabelle expects Johnnie to enlist in the Confederate army. He tries, but is turned down because he is too valuable as an engineer. However, no one explains to him why he has been rejected. Annabelle's father and brother spurn him as a coward and Annabelle breaks off their engagement. She will not speak to him until he becomes a soldier.

A party of Union spies infiltrates the South and steals Johnnie's locomotive with Annabelle aboard. Johnnie boards another locomotive, the Texas, and gives chase. He catches up with the spies and overhears them plotting a massive surprise attack. He then rescues Annabelle and steals back the General after knocking out a Union officer whom he finds in the locomotive's cab. The remaining Union officers pursue him aboard the Texas. After successfully steering the General across a high wooden bridge, Johnnie sets the bridge ablaze to slow the Union advance. Back home, he warns the Confederate army of the Union attack.

When the Texas arrives at the burning bridge, the Union generals decide to send the locomotive across in spite of the danger. The bridge collapses and the train crashes into the river. A reaction shot shows the flabbergasted Union generals, one of whom is played by Keaton's father. In this nose-thumbing fantasy, Keaton, through his character, finally eludes Joe's persecution.

Back in town, Johnnie alerts the Confederate soldiers, who rush to confront the Union troops at the bridge. Johnnie is left alone on the town's deserted streets. No one acknowledges his heroism. He tries to join the battle, but keeps tripping over his sword. When he finally arrives at the front, his sword gets stuck in its scabbard. Johnnie then accidentally fires a cannon and destroys the river's dam. Floodwaters sweep away the last of the Union troops.

After the victory, Johnnie visits his locomotive. The unconscious Union officer now revives. He turns out to be the commander of the Union army, and Johnnie gets credit for his capture. He is enlisted as a lieutenant and awarded the Union commander's sword. Annabelle loves him at last. The two kiss sitting on a wheel rod of Johnnie's locomotive. But characteristically, Keaton undercuts the happy ending. The new lieutenant must return each salute from an endless line of soldiers marching past, so he waves his arm mechanically while trying to savor Annabelle's kisses.[9]

The ending of *The Cameraman* shows the same ironic undercutting of the hero's moment of triumph.

The Cameraman: Keaton and his equipment

Keaton's character, an aspiring newsreel photographer named Luke Shannon, mistakenly believes that a ticker-tape parade for Charles Lindbergh is actually for him. Luke has accidentally been filmed performing a heroic rescue (as perhaps Keaton hoped his own innate goodnes would be recorded on film). *The Cameraman* also addresses Luke's crisis of masculinity, represented by his struggle for mastery over the camera and its tripod. His equipment is barely adequate. The men in the newsroom mock it. Indeed, Luke can hardly manage it; he keeps shattering the glass office door with the tripod legs. More than innocent clumsiness, this also constitutes a gesture of anger at the other cameramen's derision.

Johnnie Gray also struggles with phallic objects that he cannot quite master, especially the recalcitrant locomotive. He has even more trouble with the sword. The belt is much too big, the sword long enough to trip over—he is again a child dressed up in a grown man's outfit.[10] In battle, the time for masculine prowess, he cannot control his weapon. In *The General*'s happy ending, Johnnie receives the sword of the Union commander. In effect he is given a status phallic symbol. But it is not really his, nor has he really earned this symbol of masculine power in the way everyone thinks he has.

In these two films, the emasculating father-figure has become more peripheral. Keaton's character seems to have internalized the perpetual belittlements delivered elsewhere by the likes of Battling Butler and Steamboat Bill. However, in the form of Annabelle's rejecting parent or Luke's scornful boss, this character's judgments continue to set the conditions of Buster's struggles. Buster spends most of these two films alone, struggling in war zones (the Civil War, the gang war that Luke films in *The Cameraman*). Keaton thus portrays the consequences of early abuse for later life: an internalized sense of insecurity, inadequacy, and isolation.

The psychological themes of Keaton's comedy are broadly relevant. For example, *Battling Butler,* one of Keaton's biggest box-office successes and his favorite among his own films (Rohauer, 5), is in large part a fantasy of revenge on a bullying parent. The film's popularity may be due in part to the universality of this theme: Keaton's films speak to all those who endured even occasional humiliation, not to mention abuse, as children.

There are, of course, non-psychological elements of Keaton's comedy—notably his physical grace. However, most of the elements that distinguish Keaton's comedic style are closely related to his personal history, as well as to longstanding comic traditions.

Bergson places at the heart of comedy situations in which human beings cease to behave like humans, and instead act mechanically and inelastically. (67) The appeal of The Three Keatons' stage routines depended on Buster's being treated like an object—typified by the valise handle he wore and by his stage name, "The Human Mop"—as well as the mechanical quality of his rigidly controlled face. Although the comic spectacle of humans being treated as objects predates and transcends Keaton's personal history, this comic tradition becomes in Keaton's films a medium for his personal experience of objectification and emotional neglect.

Exquisite timing also distinguishes Keaton's comedy—particularly his build-ups and use of suspense in constructing gags. For example, in *The Navigator,* cannibals swarm Keaton's ship via a rope ladder. We watch as Buster chops at the rope, misses, trips over a lasso, tries again. The humor derives from our suspense over the timing of the seemingly inevitable attack, or our surprise at its arrival from an unexpected direction. This atmosphere of inevitable, yet unpredictable, violence was central to Keaton's childhood. His father would hit Buster when drunk or imagining himself slighted—circumstances over which Buster had little or no control. As a director, Keaton could take control of the unpredictable blows; he became the one to time the surprises.

In his introduction to Bergson's *Laughter,* Wylie Sypher notes that comedy requires "an insensitivity on the part of the beholder, an 'anesthesia of the heart,' which numbs our pity and allows us to examine, unsociably, someone who suddenly looks like a puppet." (xii) According to Bergson, there is an absence of feeling that usually accompanies laughter. The natural environment of laughter is indifference. (63) Keaton's physical comedy—his falls, flips, slips—derives, to be sure, from a long clown tradition. But what is important psychologically is that tradition's cathartic appeal. As a clown, Keaton becomes a scapegoat who allows audiences to distance themselves from their own experiences of humiliation by attaching these painful feelings to the clown. Clowns limit the possibility of empathy through costumes and make-up that clearly indicate their difference from the audience. Although the audience may identify with Keaton as his innate goodness is vindicated, Keaton tends to limit the possibility of identification through his character's repressed affect as well as through his ironic endings.

Film-making permitted Keaton to make a coded record of his childhood, perhaps in the subconscious

Keaton with Kathryn McGuire in *Sherlock, Jr.*

hope of communicating with what Miller calls a "sympathetic witness"—someone who could understand him and relieve his loneliness. When in the middle of his career he was suddenly deprived of his creative outlet and could no longer communicate his experience symbolically, he began to do so symptomatically, through addictive and self-destructive behavior.

Keaton's biographers and critics skirt the reasons why Keaton created the particular film character he did. Rudi Blesh acknowledges that "Keaton and his character were of a piece . . . to a remarkable degree it is impossible to separate the two." But Blesh inverts the relationship between Keaton and his character. He makes the implausible claim that the troubles in Keaton's life actually derived from the trouble-ridden character he played: "There is no mistaking the evidence," Blesh concludes, "the character took hold of Buster Keaton himself." (270)

Other critics have noted only the most trivial echoes of Keaton's life in his work. None have treated his films as deeply personal art. Daniel Moews, for example, asserts that "biography, except for showing how Keaton learned his comic craft, adds little to an understanding of his work." (38) David Robinson discerns in Keaton's work "a mystic quality detached from his private and personal being." (9) But Keaton's films become "mystic" only when they are mystified—that is, when their biographical sources are obscured. Other critics propose that Keaton's films express the insecurity of American identity, or the struggle between man and machine in the industrial age. They describe Buster as "an eternal pessimist defeated by modern life's complexities." (Wead and Lellis, 101) While such interpretations may have merit, they seem to us to take the emotional center out of Keaton's films. They obfuscate as much as they explain.

The failure of Keaton's biographers and critics to link his life and creative work stems from an unwillingness to look at Keaton's childhood from the perspective of Buster the child. Here is the source of the "freezing whisper . . . of melancholia" that Agee discerned in Keaton's work. Once we take into account the reality of Keaton's childhood, we can trace its influence on both his marvelous creativity and his disaster-filled life, and we are no longer distanced from the powerful psychological messages that distinguish his achingly brilliant comedies.

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Notes

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1. None of Keaton's biographers seems to have investigated Joe's abuse of Myra.
2. Dardis attributes Keaton's low grosses to lack of promotion by his distributor, United Artists. In addition, exhibitors resented the high fees UA charged for films by Chaplin, Pickford, and Fairbanks, which led them to book fewer of Keaton's. Nor was Keaton capable of the kind of self-promotion that Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin used to boost their popularity. (149-150)
3. Keaton also proved capable of his own version of his father's obliviousness to others' feelings. As a director he could be abusive toward employees and never bothered to learn the names of people with whom he worked closely for years. Nor could he understand why they might be upset about it. (Dardis, 129)
4. These included many gloomy exercises in nostalgia. Bad enough was a job as Red Skelton's uncredited gag-writer for insipid rehashes of Keaton's own best films. The ultimate indignity was Paramount's 1957 revisionist *The Buster Keaton Story*—a gruesome distortion of his life and work. It nauseated Keaton, but brought enough in rights for a down payment on a retirement home.
5. Perhaps this scenario is rooted in Myra's explanation that Joe beat Buster because he was mad at "Old Father Time." The young son seemed to possess the time that the aging father felt had been stolen from him.
6. The theme of rejection by father-figures reaches cosmic proportions in *The Haunted House* (1921), in which Buster dreams he is climbing a huge staircase. When he reaches the top, a white-bearded figure pulls a lever and sends him sliding down to hell. There a devil records "Keaton: In."
7. Keaton himself wrote the ending of *Battling Butler*, which was not part of the play on which the film was based. Although Keaton sometimes shared script and direction credits with others, he did most of the actual writing and directing himself. (Dardis, 104-5)
8. The image of the father shooting Buster is echoed in the final scene of the appropriately titled *Day Dreams* (1922). When Buster fails at various careers, his girlfriend's father (played by Joe Keaton) hands him a revolver and suggests he shoot himself. When Buster tries but misses, the father heaves him out of a window.
9. Several critics have emphasized what Dardis calls "the total transformation of character that is a basic feature of all of Buster's major films." (67) Moews elaborates this theory, perceiving a consistent two-part structure to Keaton's features. (3) But the transformation reading of Keaton's films is flawed in at least one crucial respect: While Buster does perform acts of bravery in the latter part of the films, and while these do win him yearned-for love and admiration, his character undergoes no internal transformation. The transformation, rather, is in the way others value him. In *The General*, for example, Johnnie's efforts go unnoticed until he literally stumbles over the Union commander who then surrenders. It is only due to this fortuitous afterthought that Johnnie becomes a hero. His courageous feats earn him no recognition at all: after he returns with his hard-won intelligence about the surprise attack, the soldiers and townspeople forget all about him. Despite his new lieutenant's stripes, Johnnie is the same person at the end of the film as he was at the beginning. His innate worthiness, to which others were initially blind, is finally recognized, but more from chance than through his own efforts.
10. Similarly, in *Go West*, Keaton keeps losing his toy-sized gun in its man-sized holster.

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Review

Intervals of Silence
Being Jewish in Germany

Writer/director/producer/cinematographer/editor: Deborah Lefkowitz.

The legacy of Germany's conduct during World War II is unsettled and unsettling. Virtually every month, some event—violence against foreign guestworkers, the opening of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.—stirs up this past. A poll completed in September, 1993, suggested that more than half of all Americans fear a resurgent Nazi movement in Germany. The attention and acclaim that has greeted Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* is, in this light, not just the product of Hollywood hype.

Documentary film-makers from Alain Resnais (*Night and Fog* [1955]) to Claude Lanzmann (*Shoah* [1986]) have poignantly scrutinized Germany's past and its residues in the present. Deborah Lefkowitz's lesser-known and independently produced *Intervals of Silence: Being Jewish in Germany* (1990) contributes to this dialogue in an innovative and striking fashion.

Lefkowitz presents the opinions, feelings, and recollections of 11 Jewish and 44 non-Jewish residents of a small industrial city in the Ruhr Valley where her (non-Jewish) husband grew up. Yet Lefkowitz does not photograph her subjects. Instead, she translates their exclusively audiotaped comments in subtitles printed over scenes of the city. These shots are often heavily matted, repeatedly processed, and replayed in slow motion. The effect is an evocative, highly reflexive, rebus-like conversation between the Germans' comments and Lefkowitz's images. It is a challenge for first-time viewers to piece the film together, but repeated viewings reveal a very definite logic underlying Lefkowitz's choices.[1]

Intervals of Silence: the marksmen's festival

In the film, whatever the topic—how the Germans believe the past relates to their present lives, how comfortable they feel about Jews living in Germany now, or how Jews got along in Germany before, during, and after the Nazi era—Lefkowitz deliberately stitches the comments together so that the subjects often talk past each other, without really connecting. The result is a film that perfectly embodies Bill Nichols' notions of the interactive and reflexive documentary modes.[2] Lefkowitz does not use the snippets of conversation to

prove any preconceived point. Nor does the film represent the apotheosis of the sound bite. It is the process of juxtaposition itself which gives *Intervals of Silence* its interactive dimension and which shows how difficult Germans find it to speak about Germany's past.

The diverse opinions of the many speakers defy any conclusive generalizations about "what Germans think" on the topics of Jews and German history. Within each of the film's segments, Lefkowitz offers six or so statements that corroborate, complement, or conflict with one another, ranging from denial to a limited embracing of the problems involved. "I never approved of Jews," says one interview subject. "I don't want to believe Jews are basically different," says another. No single voice is privileged as more humane, more sagacious, or even more representative. They all testify to the difficulty of coming to terms with—and by extension, representing—the past, and national or ethnic identity. In this regard, Lefkowitz, like Frederick Wiseman in his institutional documentaries, achieves a breadth of vision that a focus on a few individuals would have precluded. The film is intensely personal without subscribing to an ethos of individualism.

Most significantly, Lefkowitz's decision to deny the viewer the power and the pleasure of *seeing* her speakers sets *Intervals of Silence* apart from virtually all the major documentaries on Germany and the Holocaust. In Lefkowitz's film, no on-camera interview subjects are subordinated to an offscreen authority or to an onscreen provocateur like Lanzmann himself or, say, like Su Friedrich's handwritten, intertitle queries to her mother in *The Ties That Bind* (1985). Nor do we find ourselves searching the images to find the figure of the German who is the "source" of a given statement.

Moreover, the absence of speakers from the screen removes the primary arena for the representation of difference and otherness—the body, physiognomy, gestures, and clothes—that might confirm our visual stereotypes of (as one subject puts it) "those damn Nazis." This strategy of abstracted images and asynchronous sound does not, however, reconcile differences between Jew and non-Jew, stereotypes and authentic identities, or past and present. Nor is it comparable to the evasions of difference (and particularly of racism) that Ken Burns accomplished to create the popular historical documentary, *The Civil War* (1991). Instead, Lefkowitz forges a collective autobiography, a kind of painstaking ethnographic study of a particular German town 40 years after the end of World War II.

Lefkowitz's reflexive interests are apparent from the film's very first moments. It begins with a black screen, over which someone comments, "First of all, I would suggest that you show the city the way it really is." The shot fades in on a cityscape of an industrial town in the Ruhr Valley, and fades out. Over another blank screen, a second German resident advises, "That it is a beautiful piece of earth with lots of industry, lots of greenery." There follows a landscape of cattle grazing outside the city, and a fade-out. The prologue continues in this highly conventional fashion. Lefkowitz's voice-over dominates the images, as she introduces shots of her husband's church, his school, and his street. The film's title comes up. But having thus oriented us clearly, Lefkowitz subsequently demonstrates how impossible it is to show anything "as it really is."

For example, the segment immediately following the title sequence begins with a clear shot of men and musicians marching past the camera. Lefkowitz then cuts to a new, blurry shot of the marchers in slow motion, obscured by a matte which dominates the lower part of the screen. Her husband, Georg, recalls the "marksmen's festival" he attended with his grandfather as a child. (Figure 1) After this, Lefkowitz switches the dark matte to the upper portion of the shot. Now, blue and yellow tinted clouds move across the bottom of the screen in slow motion while we hear and read a eulogy for dead German soldiers "who gave their best in two terrible wars and paid for their idealism with their lives...." As more Germans speak about the role of the past in the present, the clouds dissolve to slow-motion footage of marching feet. The final voice in this segment expresses the dilemma of the postwar generation: "You did not go through the experience yourself, but in some way it hovers like a shadow in front or in back of you." On this remark, Lefkowitz freezes the footage of marching feet, and dissolves to a new segment. (Figure 2)

This sequence can evoke ambivalent responses. Most literally, we might reflect on whether the festival and the memorial speech are threatening remnants of Germany's militarized past, a harmless or necessary (cathartic) ritual for its participants, or both. At another remove, the marching feet shown in slow motion parallel the gradual, incremental differences in opinion voiced by the Germans. Lefkowitz's manipulations of film speed and stillness become an analysis of historical time, process, and progress; the freeze frame embodies the ambivalence of unresolved feelings. Most generally, Lefkowitz's insistence on "tampering" with the image reminds us of the very personal and constructed nature of memory: the obstructions, displacements, and condensations which arise from com-

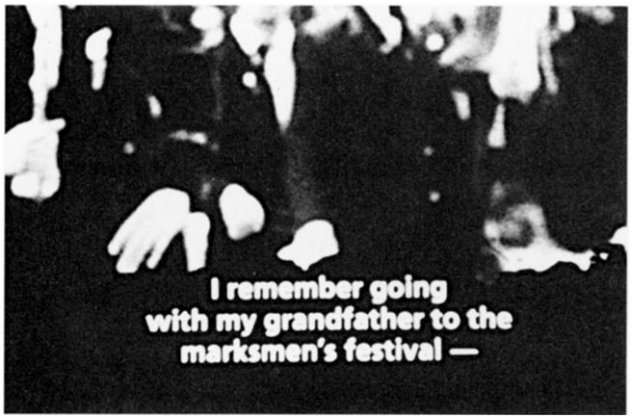

Figure 1

word its due as a representational form in a fashion that recalls avant-garde dissections of language and communication. Yet by virtue of the abstract qualities conferred on her photography by optical processing, the sound and the visuals in *Intervals of Silence* achieve a consistently equal emphasis.

The diverse processed images link up in different ways to the Germans' comments. A general analogy obtains between the processed shots and the limitations of each speaker's perspective on the problem of being Jewish in Germany. A matte blotting out the town synagogue's stained glass windows illustrates the German Jew's assertion about the "danger of being sub-

Figure 2

plex motivations and hidden agendas that her interview subjects can barely acknowledge. In fact, whenever the Germans speak, Lefkowitz employs this heavily processed imagery in a complex of connotative density.

Silence, like the freeze frame, becomes a privileged punctuation mark in the film: it denotes an impasse in the "dialogue," an unresolved point, and a transition between different segments. For example, one Jewish resident speaks of the "danger of being submerged" in a predominantly Christian nation. When another counters, "I see no reason why a Jewish culture, a Jewish life, should not return," silence ensues over several shots that shift the film to a new sequence in which non-Jewish Germans express their like or dislike of Jews. The silence here conveys the lack of conclusive answers to the question of how Jews can maintain their traditions and yet still feel at ease in Germany. Silence here further acknowledges the limits of verbal representation.

This absence of any hierarchy of meaning and authority among the speakers throughout the film also informs Lefkowitz's decision to use English subtitles prominently in the frame. She thus gives the spoken

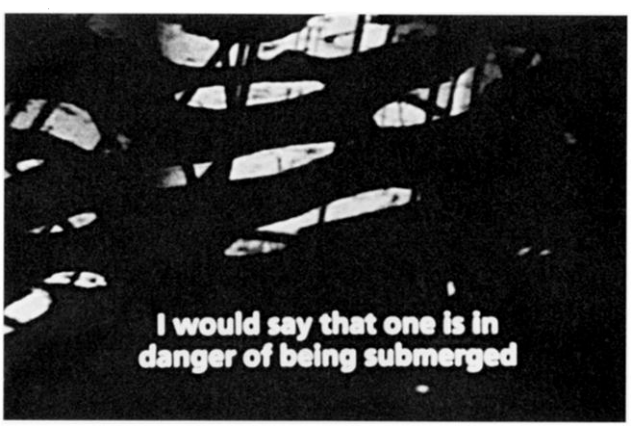

Figure 3

merged."[3] (Figure 3) In another segment, while some non-Jews state that they hope Jews feel welcome in Germany, Lefkowitz shows us the negative, slow-motion footage of a woman cleaning a window. (Figure 4) As one speaker states that she can't imagine how Jews can feel at ease in Germany, the woman swivels the window open to clean its other side. Then, another resident comments defensively that Jews "would not stay if they felt they were living among criminals." Here, the two sides of the window represent the differing attitudes of the Germans on this particular topic.

Like the mattes and optical processes, windows become a motif throughout the film that visually conveys a sense of constrained viewpoints and the constructed nature of representation.

Less obviously, Lefkowitz also links different segments of the film by repeating the same images. Early on, we see a heavily processed, slow-motion, negative image of two figures walking in an ill-defined landscape. (Figure 5) Just after one woman states, "It still costs me an effort to say that I'm Jewish. There are not really any natural reactions here in Germany," the pedestrians turn and evaporate into the bright portions of the image. Much later in the film, Lefkowitz shows us the same shot in full color at regular speed, reversed from its first appearance. What we now see are two elderly people walking down a pathway in the local cemetery as Lefkowitz informs us that her husband's grandparents are buried here. (Figure 6) Later in the film, the same image returns once more, superimposed with freeze frames of a sunset, as Germans talk about how Jews are and should be treated in Germany now.

The repetition of this shot creates retrospective linkages among segments to demonstrate that in Germany today, Jews and non-Jews integrate death into their lives and commemorate it differently: for example, some of the Jews who speak are uncomfortable about public memorials. Lefkowitz appreciates this difficulty and articulates it as a self-critique. After several shots of a Jewish cemetery, one Jewish man complains about people who represent German Jews as having a "cemetery culture." This comment highlights the challenge Lefkowitz faced in making this film. The cemeteries provide the most visual and concrete evidence of past Jewish life in Germany; yet by themselves, cemeteries are morbid and reinforce the image of Jews as victims; they should not be the only or primary form of commemoration.

There are two sequences toward the end of the film which provide powerful, summary instances of the major concerns of *Intervals of Silence* and of Lefkowitz's techniques. After two German Jews describe what it was like to live anticipating their deportation (over shots of slow-motion, negative footage that we gradually recognize as wires over a train track), silence and shots of industrial smokestacks mark the internment experience and the limits of articulated memory. We then see a view out a train window, while these same two Jews describe their return to the town from the camps, one to a group of friends, the other to no one: "I alone survived."

At this point, Lefkowitz makes her premise for the entire film more explicit. She uses a train window to matte scenes of amusement park rides. On the sound track, a barker promotes a magic house as "marvelous," "wondrous," "unparalleled," "unimaginable." (Figure 7) Then Lefkowitz freezes the shot each time a non-Jew recalls his or her amazement at learning about the death camps ("horrible, horrible"). "One can never fully feel someone else's pain," remarks one resident. Such statements register at once the banality of attempts to comprehend such overwhelming horror and the way such expressions can function as a dismissal that relieves us of the burden of memory. A silence then ensues over the same slow-motion footage of the train window, evoking the limits of empathy and compassion.

Slowly the train window moves across to the left side of the screen. (Figure 8) When the Germans' comments resume, the subjects speak *not* of the Holocaust horrors themselves, but of how terrible it was to see atrocity footage. The silence and the shifted position of the window thus retrospectively function to distinguish between these responses to two different phenomena. "I honestly have to say that so much was shown on television, in the press, we just couldn't see it anymore. It was too much." Another subject comments, "If these films were not shown all the time, then maybe grass would grow up over some of this."

Lefkowitz grants this speaker's wish: within the window, she dissolves an image of tree branches that fill up the frame. The train window is gradually replaced by a matted, tree-filled landscape. Then the matte dissolves to render a full color shot of a playground. (Figure 9) Lefkowitz here speaks of photographing the spot, and then undercuts the pleasure it affords by revealing that it had been a Jewish cemetery before the war.

The diverse chains of association built up throughout *Intervals of Silence* reach a critical mass in this sequence. The apparently innocent playground, posed as a solution to the problem of memory and documentation, becomes yet another ambivalent object that has not escaped Germany's past. This playground assumes a resonance equivalent to that of the smokestacks, the trains running from the city, the marching feet: it is evidence, a remnant, however obscure, of the inescapable past.

In these sequences, *Intervals of Silence* conforms to the logic of the palimpsest Linda Williams has identified in documentaries such as *Shoah* and *The Thin Blue Line* (1988):

> The past events examined in these films [the Holocaust and the murder of a Dallas police

officer, respectively] are not offered as complete, totalizable, apprehensible. They are fragments, pieces of the past invoked by memory, not unitary representable truths but, as Freud once referred to the psychic mechanism of memory, a palimpsest, described succinctly by Mary Ann Doane as "the sum total of its rewritings through time." The "event" remembered is never whole, never fully represented, never isolated in the past alone but only accessible through a memory which resides, as Doane has put it, "in the reverberations between events."[4]

Errol Morris and Lanzmann accomplish the presentation of the palimpsest, as Williams points out, by probing around the lies and illusions of the various subjects interviewed in their films.

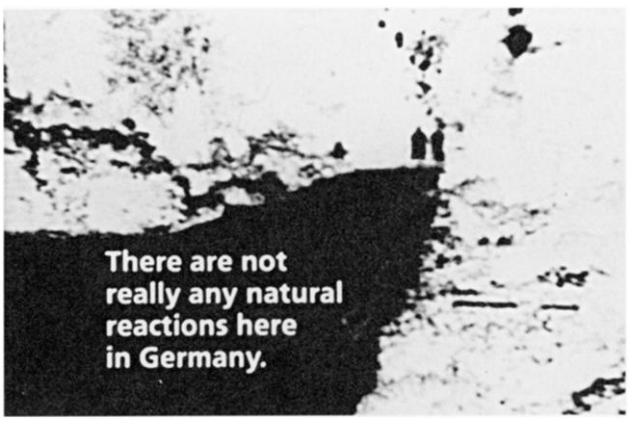

Figure 4

Lefkowitz's strategy is strikingly different. She does not concentrate on any one speaker for an extended period. She answers her speakers' statements not with further questions, but by the images she composes and in the juxtapositions of their words with the comments of other Germans. At the same time that she documents the varied perspectives of the residents, the images she presents—processed, matted, reversed, and in slow motion—become themselves potential fragments of memory, visual palimpsests marked with rewritings. By an unexpected avenue, then, *Intervals of Silence* joins Morris's and Lanzmann's films: all three "do not so much represent this past as they reactivate it in images of the present."[5]

Though we do not hear Lefkowitz asking questions of the Germans, she is hardly absent from the film. Her presence is manifested in her meticulous juxtapositions of comments, silences, and images. More

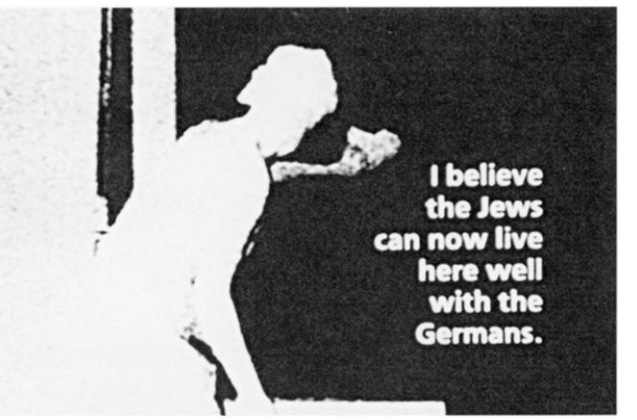

Figure 5

directly, she speaks frequently on the sound track about her own visits to the town, her first visit to her in-laws' home, and about making the film itself. Lefkowitz's comments are the only ones that accompany unprocessed images in the film and they offer the possibility of a unifying and privileged ("outsider") perspective on the diverse voices of the film. But her remarks are carefully layered into the web of the film so that they are not privileged above those of the Germans.

Nor does Lefkowitz provide the film with a definite resolution to the difficulties she has documented. Over repeated slow-motion footage of ducks swimming across a lake, a number of Jews express the hope

Figure 6

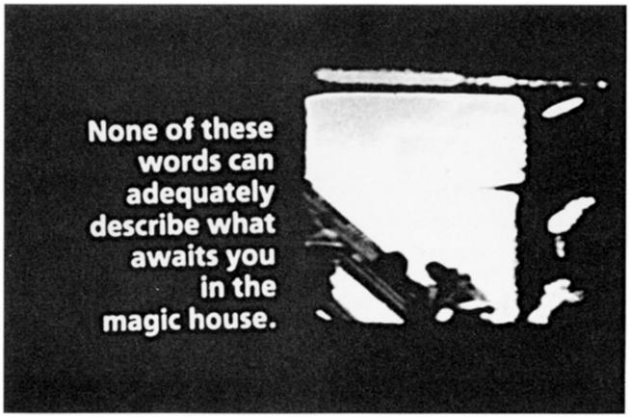

Figure 7

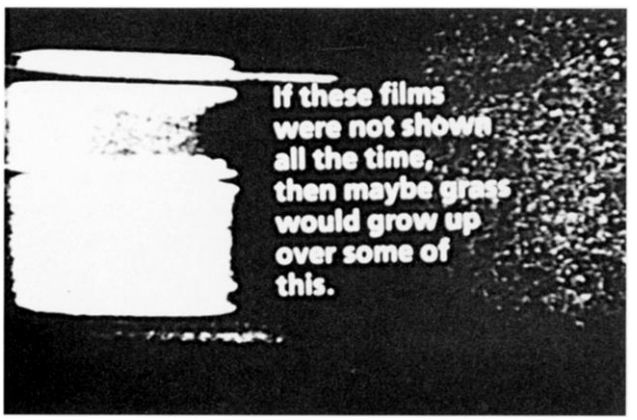

Figure 8

Lefkowitz what the marksmen's festival recalled for her husband: a comforting tradition. Yet Lefkowitz does not suggest that this comfort resolves her ambivalence definitively or that her solution is satisfying for her audience.

Intervals of Silence, like many avant-garde works, is an extremely challenging film to watch. After puzzling through the film, attempting to make connections between comments and images or between segments, or trying to find a comfortable space from which to judge the various sentiments expressed, the viewer is also encouraged to appreciate the complex difficulties

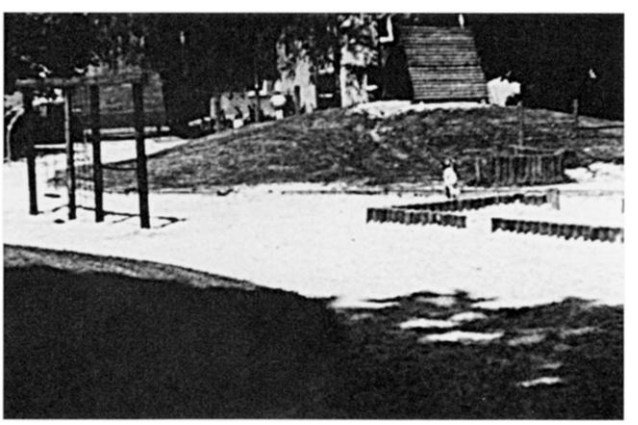

Figure 9

that they or their children can feel comfortable in Germany. Over the same footage Lefkowitz then remarks that though she feels more comfortable as a Jew in other cities, "the singing of a melody familiar to me from my childhood is enough to give me the feeling that I am at home." The images fade out, and over the blank screen (and eventually the credits), two men sing "Adon Olam," a Hebrew hymn that frequently concludes the Jewish prayer service. The song evokes for that a guilty past poses for the present. In fact, the openness of the film suggests that each viewer has to come to terms with these questions in his or her own way.

Many viewers of the film do so, being free to make connections or not. According to Lefkowitz, the varied responses to the film among German and American audiences provide a compelling index of the extent to which *Intervals of Silence* is open-ended. Some find their expectations of German anti-Semitism confirmed,

while others feel the film has evaded the issue entirely. Some find it an unfair depiction of the Germans, while others have dismissed it for not taking a more definite stand, for not overtly denouncing the lies, the illusions, and the prejudices of the Germans who speak.

As a carefully modulated documentary which paradoxically arranges its material to create a sense of openness, *Intervals of Silence* rewards close scrutiny. It is a conscientious study of the diverse ambivalences that inform notions of selfhood, otherness, and the struggle to come to terms with the past. It is also a film that keeps the troubling heritage of the Holocaust alive and open for discussion.

MATTHEW BERNSTEIN

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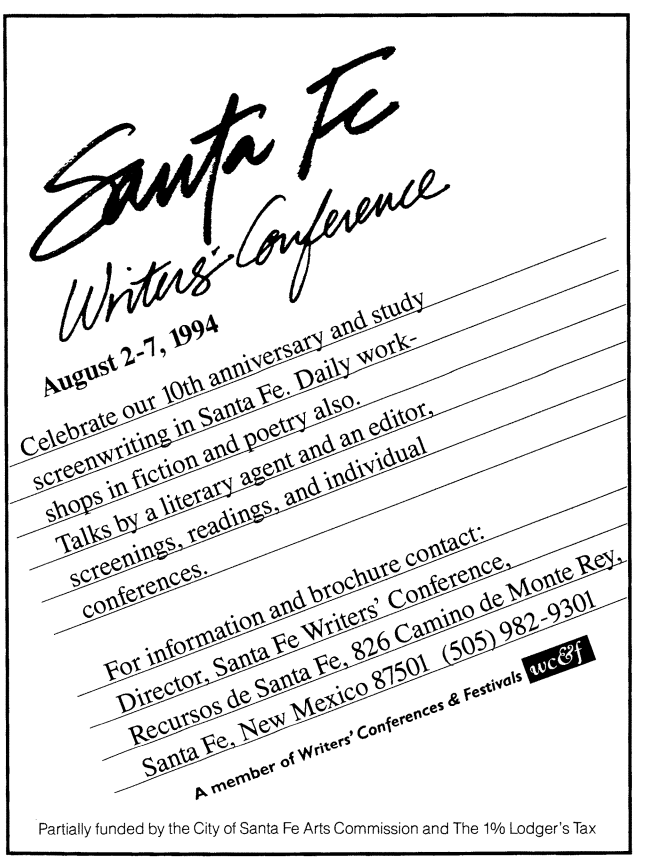
Intervals of Silence: Being Jewish in Germany is available for rental or purchase from Lefkowitz Films, P.O. Box 94, Riverside, CA 92502. (909) 682-0444.

Notes

I thank Deborah Lefkowitz for talking with me about the making of *Intervals of Silence*, for supplying a transcript of the English titles in the film, and for permission to publish frame enlargements.

1. Lefkowitz describes the making of the film in her "Editing from Life," in Jeanette Clausen and Sara Friedrichsmeyer, eds., *Women in German Yearbook 8* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 199–215.
2. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 44–56. As Nichols defines it, the interactive documentary mode, typified by Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, emphasizes the film-maker's "act of gathering information or building knowledge, the process of social and historical interpretation. . . ." (49) By contrast, the reflexive mode, exemplified by Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line*, challenges the documentarist's presumption of being able to know and represent any historical reality adequately. (57)
3. Interpretation suggested by Geoffrey Wisner, "Movies," *The Harvard Post*, November 23, 1990.
4. Linda Williams, "Mirrors Without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary," *Film Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (Spring 1993), pp. 9–21.
5. Williams, p. 17.



Annual Film Quarterly Book Roundup

A Certain Realism

Making Use of Pasolini's Film Theory and Practice

By Maurizio Viano. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993. $38.00 cloth; $18.00 paper.

A Certain Realism: Making Use of Pasolini's Film Theory and Practice is a welcome addition to the ever growing number of works in English devoted to the Italian director. Scholarly and ambitious, this volume begins with an overview of Pier Paolo Pasolini's life and the cultural and personal currents—specified by Viano as humanism, Catholicism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, and homosexuality—which influenced him. It then proceeds to a detailed chronological discussion of each of his many films. Throughout, the book is informed by the desire to read, or re-read, Pasolini's theories and films in terms of one another so that new light is shed on both.

Key to this re-reading, and to the book, as the title implies, is the question of Pasolini's "realism." In posing this question, Viano must deal with one of the thorniest, and most persistent, issues in film history and theory. For, as he acknowledges, the term has been defined in a multitude of ways, and he groups them in three major categories: "1) the rendering of minute details 2) the respect for and fidelity to real time and space 3) a socially progressive portrayal of the reality beyond appearances that aims to teach the spectator how things really were/are." (55)

While the second and third definitions of realism, in particular, have often been seen as opposed to one another (i.e., Bazin vs. Brecht), Viano appears to apply all three definitions, as well as several others, to Pasolini's "certain realism." But even using many definitions, the author's task is not an easy one. For while Pasolini admitted that he had been influenced by neorealism, he also spoke of his "horror of naturalism," and was quick to point out the important ways in which his style differed from that, say, of a Rossellini. And while he often declared his love for "reality," or defined cinema as the "language of reality," he seemed to envision "reality" not in stylistic but in phenomenological, social, and sometimes mystical terms.

To make his case for Pasolini's "certain realism," Viano begins by collapsing the distinction between "reality" and "realism" that Pasolini was usually careful to maintain. "Pasolini's fetishistic use of the word *reality*," he declares, "led him to frame his own cinematography within the discourse of realism." (x) As we read further, it becomes apparent that this shift from "realism" to "reality" is one that permeates the whole of Viano's book and that films are qualified as "realist" for reasons that often have little to do with one another. Hence, *Accattone*

is "realist" because it allows Pasolini to express his vision through his characters; *La Ricotta* incarnates a "weak" realism because the fictional director of this film-within-a-film uses what he sees "to make a statement about reality"; (107) *Uccellacci e Uccellini* (*The Hawks and the Sparrows*) is similarly "weak" because the behavior of the protagonists "bends in accordance with the position that they occupy within the system of differences exhibited in each of the episodes." (157) In *Edipo Re* (*Oedipus Rex*), realism takes "the road of autobiography," (176) and the highly allegorical and cerebral *Porcile* "operates within a realist mode because it attempts . . . to allude to a historical world outside the text." (215) Even the way we read or interpret a text can be realist or not: hence a reading which sees a hidden gay subtext is more realist because "it uncovers a textual dimension that is normally over-looked *and* stems from the viewer's positional awareness." (60) On the other hand, the films of the trilogy of life—*Il Decamerone* (*The Decameron*), *I Racconti di Canterbury* (*The Canterbury Tales*), *Il Fiore della Mille e Una Notte* (*A Thousand and One Nights*)—which Viano clearly dislikes, are emphatically not realist (despite their use of "real" or "minute" details) because, in "feeding the ongoing commercialization of sexuality," they "harmed not only realism but reality itself." (269)

In a sense, I don't quarrel with much of this. Pasolini *was* ardently concerned with the nature of reality; he did want to use films ethically—to change the way we view the world. But I do question whether lumping all these impulses under the rubric of realism, an overdetermined word if ever there was one, is helpful. And I also fear that the way the word is used, almost as a synonym for "good," echoes the kind of moralistic charges that Italian critics continually launched against Pasolini: i.e., he had abandoned "realism" for "formalism," his films were decadent, etc.

In addition to his discussion of realism, Viano also analyzes two important subtexts in Pasolini's cinema: the many allusions to homosexuality, and to cinema itself, that are often expressed in an indirect or veiled manner. For example, Viano suggests that the curtain in the child's room in *Edipo Re* might be taken as a stand-in for the cinematic screen. Here, too, as in his discussion of realism, Viano's arguments may not always be convincing. But they certainly reveal him to be a fearless and original critic.

NAOMI GREENE

■ Naomi Greene teaches in the Department of French and Italian at the University of California at Santa Barbara and is the author of *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Cinema of Heresy* (Princeton University Press, 1990).

Cinema, Censorship, and the State

The Writings of Nagisa Oshima

Edited by Annette Michelson.
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.
$37.50 cloth; $14.95 paper.

This translation of Oshima's collected articles provides an invaluable resource to those interested in Japanese films, society, and culture. The collection represents a sampling of Oshima's prolific publications; the selection is a good one, but represents only a fraction of his writings. The articles assembled here are the same ones (with the single exception of a new piece, "Perspectives on Japanese Film") that were published in French translation as *Ecrits 1956–1978: Dissolution et Jaillissement* by Editions Gallimard in 1980. A similar collection in German has been available for years. Though these translations and the original Japanese articles have been widely quoted in articles on Oshima, his writings have only now been translated into English.

Except for "Perspectives," the articles are arranged in chronological order, tracing the history of Oshima's involvement in the Japanese war industry, from his beginnings as an assistant director and scriptwriter with a vision for the renewal of Japanese cinema to his ascension to internationally known director. Oshima has become increasingly well known in Europe and the U.S., leading to the recent rerelease of his early features previously unknown outside Japan and Southeast Asia. Exposure to these early films will make the first section of this volume even more intriguing to American readers. The fact that most of Oshima's works are in circulation at this time makes such a historical volume more accessible. As the most widely seen director to have emerged in Japanese film-making since the 1950s, Oshima is for most Western viewers the emblem of the Japanese New Wave. His writings help place his film work in the context of contemporary work and the political influences that shaped this new film-making movement.

This collection is not so much a scholarly volume as a primary resource, the writing of an active participant in film-making and criticism. (Godard's volume of collected essays, *Godard sur Godard,* is a similar publication.) One expects such writing to be polemical and to embody the aesthetic principles of the director. Oshima's writing adopts just such a tone and style. The essays serve as a manifesto expressing his artistic tenets and a strong call for the transformation of much in Japanese culture.

The writings offer a historical overview of how Japanese film directors, beginning in the mid-1950s,

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The writings offer a historical overview of how Japanese film directors, beginning in the mid-1950s,

began to break away from the traditional genres of melodrama and historical epic toward a more vital modernistic filmic expression. Central to this new film-making was the recognition and funding of younger talents and new approaches. Oshima argues for a negation of the scenario in favor of allowing the film-making process to create dynamic confrontations; new images must be discovered based on personal experience and the externalization of subjectivity. Oshima matches his championing of the personal in the writings from 1969–74 with a variety of autobiographical and psychoanalytic revelations.

Oshima's writings during his period of exile from the commercial film industry (1963–65) provide insight into his documentary work for television during this time. As this work is as yet unseen outside Japan, his presentation of his documentary research is the only way (outside of viewing the films in Japanese archives) to become familiar with this crucial work. As I had the opportunity to view the TV films in Japan, I can attest to their great interest, but even for those who have not seen the films, the articles on them offer Oshima's analysis of such issues as the war in Vietnam, Korean society, and attitudes toward Koreans who fought for the Japanese in World War II.

The late 1960s brought a return to commercial features and an intense polemic by Oshima against those who, he contended, misunderstood his work. He offers an explanation of his fascination with sexual obsession and crime. The articles discuss several of the films made during this period in detail and draw the connections with the student protest movements of the time.

Another ongoing theme of the collection is the confrontation of the engaged film-maker with the industry and governmental agencies of censorship. This applies to both the early writings protesting the withdrawal from distribution of *Night and Fog in Japan* (*Nihon no Uoru to Kiri*, 1960) and the later pieces discussing the censorship of *In the Realm of the Senses* (*Ai no Corrida*, 1976). Throughout the volume, Oshima attacks prudery and argues for the release of repressed desire. Oshima views women as less sexually inhibited than men and sees male violence as an outgrowth of repression. He chooses to represent that violence repeatedly in his films. The sexual politics of his views on sex and violence are not directly addressed in the manner that American readers might expect, but the understanding of sexuality and violence in terms that are consonant with psychoanalysis is of great interest. These issues are among the most controversial in the book.

It should be clear from this summary that the writing is rich in historical and theoretical interest. The subtitle of the French volume, *Dissolution et Jaillissement*, which could be translated as "dissolution and regrowth," indicates Oshima's contention throughout the volume that tradition must be struck down to allow for renewal. With so much of Western writing on Japan concentrating on the persistence of tradition within the contemporary industrial state, Oshima's essays should provide evidence of other voices and tendencies in Japanese culture. If the American version has substituted "Cinema, Censorship, and the State" for the more poetic French formulation, it is to signal to readers the way in which Oshima's writings do address the political (and what resonance of Alexander Kluge's writings can be heard).

Hideo Suzuki's notes are an excellent addition to the text and they continuously provide specifics of Oshima's references and place points in context. Annette Michelson has added a brief introduction in praise of Oshima's significance. The translation, by Dawn Lawson, is often quite good, but sometimes disappointing; both the Japanese and the French carry a certain rhetoric well that often appears overloaded in the translation into English. Added to this insensitivity to tone are certain mistakes, such as the ungrammatical "the worldwide nationalism mood," which could easily have been rendered as a "global mood of nationalism"; "technical expressions," which could have been either "expressive film techniques," or simply "formal expression." And we can only puzzle over a sentence like "Pornography restores sexual energy by eliciting them into a state of mind in which laughs foolishly about sex instead of thinking about it seriously." It could read, "Pornography, in eliciting laughter rather than serious thought about sex, creates a state of mind that restores sexual energy."

The new addition to this volume, Oshima's thoughts on Japanese cinema today, is most intriguing. He rejects the "decline of Japanese cinema" formulation in its customary critical terms in favor of a positive gloss on the internationalization of the Japanese people and a corollary internationalization of a "small" cinema, films which "attract audiences everywhere, even if they are small." Rather than hoping for a revival through a new generation of young Japanese film-makers working primarily in comedy (he does not mention Yoshimitsu Morita or Juzo Itami, for example), Oshima implicitly includes this younger generation with himself as those seeking primarily a scattered international following able "to place value on individual directors." One only wishes that the films Oshima still promises to make will soon be projected on our screens.

MAUREEN TURIM

■ Maureen Turim teaches at the University of Florida.

Crisis Cinema

The Apocalyptic Idea in Postmodern Narrative Film

Edited by Christopher Sharrett. Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1993. $34.95 cloth; $14.95 paper.

This anthology opens with a claim that it will play off the "Nietzschean" "nihilism" of Jean Baudrillard and the "faithful" (to Marxism) Fredric Jameson in a series of essays on films as disparate as *Repo Man* and Fellini's *Casanova*. Under the signs of Nietzsche and Marx (a "tag-team for the next millennium" as Christopher Sharrett puts it in his introduction), the book's various authors chart, says Sharrett, "the ways by which the apocalyptism of the postmodern ethos is reflected in cinema."

Postmodern theory's notion of apocalypse is, evidently, of a final catastrophe, "an idea of the end that is deliberately suicidal (and religious) in conception" (Sharrett on *Taxi Driver*). But the religious (specifically Christian) notion of apocalypse that informs American culture, and many of the films under analysis here, is a notion of ultimate *rebirth*. Thus I cannot agree with, say, Jon Lewis that *Rumble Fish* "ends unambiguously in boredom, suicide and hopelessness"; with Catherine Russell that the "reconciliation" of *Wild at Heart*'s finale is "arbitrarily" contrived; or with Sharrett that "Travis' final drifting into the night" in *Taxi Driver* is "unimportant." As false or forced as these endings may seem, they all partake of an apocalyptic (in the full sense of the word) *optimism*, bizarre as this may seem.

To go further: Sharrett's posited dichotomy between Nietzschean "awakening to the nullity of knowledge and being" and Marxist awareness of history proves an impossible gap for his writers to bridge. James Combs' piece on the politics of some contemporary films, for example, is good only in its (most unNietzschean) humanism. Mick Broderick's essay on the "Mad Max" trilogy, defines, quite eloquently, apocalypse in all its hues, but only by employing as its major reference not Baudrillard and Jameson but Joseph Campbell. Broderick's piece succeeds, like Combs', primarily in its implicit challenge to its editor's stated ideology. *Crisis Cinema* is a book that only works in contradiction to its editor; its successes are local, not global.

This said, a number of pieces are indeed worth reading: A. Keith Goshorn is amusing on *Repo Man*'s punk sensibility, Guiliana Bruno is useful on *Blade Runner*'s "questions of identity," and Tony Williams is correct, I think, about the "masochism" of *Brazil*. Philip Turetzky interestingly juxtaposes the physical experience of watching television with the "refashioned bodies" of *Dead Ringers*, producing a sophisticated critique of the "televisual complex" that dares to sound a moral note. And Arthur Kroker and Michael Dorland's Bataillean ravings about sex ("panic penises," "panic ovaries") in "Panic Cinema" has the virtues, at least, of brevity and directness. On the down side, Scott Bukatmen reveals inflated expectations for "virtual reality," while Frank Burke's paper on Fellini seems to belong in some other anthology. The high theoretical claims made by Sharrett's introduction aren't sustained, in other words, by either its best or its more workaday papers. Given the push-pull dialectic of Marx and Nietzsche he posits, I don't think they could be.

GREGG RICKMAN

■ Gregg Rickman teaches at San Francisco State University.

Filmmaking by the Book

Italian Cinema and Literary Adaptation

By Millicent Marcus. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. $48.50 cloth; $15.95 paper.

Given the humanistic background of Italian culture, cinema, at least until the 1960s, was not allowed to forget its humble origins in the nickelodeon and was always forced to prove itself as art vis-à-vis what seemed its closest relative: literature. This resulted in a strict and intimate relationship between the two media, often with the implicit understanding that literature was somehow superior. One only needs to think of the criticism leveled at Pasolini when he made film-making his primary activity, or of the frequency with which writers are allowed to pontificate on cinema (e.g., Enzo Siciliano or the late Moravia) as if their status gave them right and insight into film-making. In spite of the fact that Italy's major contribution to the global culture industry has in recent times been mostly in the field of cinema, films were and often are still regarded as somewhat ancillary. It is therefore of the utmost relevance to investigate the ways in which the two media have interacted, which is what *Filmmaking by the Book* sets out to do.

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collaboration for *Cabiria* through Zavattini's and neorealism's antiliterary bias to more recent times when cinema can indeed be seen as influencing the way fiction is written. In the second half of the introduction, she proceeds to discuss, by means of the story-vs.-discourse binary, what is in fact a problem that has emerged in any debate on multimediality, intentionality, and identity: Is there a pre-existing core of meaning which would subsequently be conveyed unaltered through various media or, conversely, is it inaccurate to postulate an identity before and beyond discourse? Refraining from taking a stand in the debate and astutely deciding to exploit both models for what they can offer, Marcus broadens the perspective by arguing that the screenplay is, after all, yet another example of literary source; she concludes that "adaptation writ large is thus the basis of all film-making, . . . the site for the enactment of art's quintessential transformatory operations." (24)

Choosing "fidelity analysis" (the criticism that verifies the extent to which a film is faithful to the literary original) as the straw man against which she will situate her readings, Marcus ends the introduction by declaring her intention of *not* aiming at some general theory on adaptation: "And since all films that take their inspiration from literature represent sui generis solutions to the problems of adaptation, let us conduct our inquiry on the only level where our conclusions can speak with authority—on the concrete level of cinematic practice with each encounter." Perhaps to show how a same author often embarks on different adaptive strategies or, perhaps, to fulfill her own wish for symmetry, Marcus selected five directors (Visconti, De Sica, Pasolini, the Taviani brothers, and Fellini) and two films by each of them. The result is a book divided in ten chapters, each dedicated to a filmic adaptation of a piece of "literature."

Visconti's *La Terra Trema* (1948), according to Marcus, represents less an adaptation than "a typological fulfillment of an earlier textual promise," (31) in that Visconti brings out a Marxist dimension that was latent in Verga's novel of the same name. *The Leopard* (1963), on the other hand, is a highly politicized interpretation of the novel by Lampedusa, a sort of Viscontian response to the detractors of Lampedusa's novel. Through "his use of Marxist cultural heroes—Gramsci and Lukács—" (45) Visconti shows that the novel, to which his film remained remarkably faithful, lent itself to a leftist rewriting of what is perhaps the most controversial page of Italian history and national identity, namely the Risorgimento.

In *Two Women* (1960), De Sica fails to live up to the challenge posed by Moravia's novel (a first-person narrative from a mother's point of view), which would have required him to align the film's gaze with that of a woman protagonist. By employing Sophia Loren, De Sica instead falls prey to the dominant visual pleasure system which fetishizes the woman's body through a male gaze. In *The Garden of the Finzi Continis* (1970), De Sica sought an absolution from his previous commercial and consolatory productions. In the wake of the novel's implicit denunciation of the protagonists' "garden mentality" (retreat into an ivory tower of sorts), "the film renounces its own temptation to escapism and pleasurable withdrawal by insisting on the cinema's realist vocation—not in any literal, documentarist sense but in the moral imperative, enshrined by neorealism, to historical accountability." (103)

Pasolini's *Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964) exhibits "the gaze of faith," in that the Marxist film-maker adopts the point of view of a believer in Christ's divinity. To do so, the evangelist's text is literally brought to the screen, Pasolini's textual intervention being limited to selecting, ordering, and imaging the original. But, by disposing of Boccaccio's frame story (in itself a statement of harmony and order), Pasolini's *The Decameron* (1970) hijacks a "sacred" text of the humanistic tradition. What was meant as a celebration of the rising middle class becomes, in Pasolini's intention, a celebration of lower-class physicality.

The Tavianis' *Padre Padrone* (1977) entertains a conflictive relationship to Ledda's autobiography, in that the film-makers are wary of fidelity to the father source and adopt a range of Brechtian techniques to put the original in quotations, at several removes. Simultaneously, the Tavianis can be seen as carrying on the book's message, which is predicated on the critical acquisition of codes to be later used against the father. *Kaos* (1984) also celebrates the message implicit in Pirandello's writing, a metafictional message that praises poetic imagination. Significantly transforming the Sicilian writer's short stories, framing them within a fable of imaginative flights and adding an oneiric biographic coda, the Tuscan film-makers discover the poetic latency of the text, or, better, of textuality *tout court.*

Fellini's well-known autobiographical impulse led him to show no interest in fidelity. Honestly parading the subjective bent of the director's adaptation, Fellini's *Casanova* (1976) harbors authorial self-projections as well as reflections on artistic creation. *La Voce della Luna* (*The Voice of the Moon*, 1989) also takes radical liberties with its literary source, allegedly chosen by Fellini for its being "a saga of the Po River Valley"—his own native region. The novel's main character, Ivo, nonetheless offered Fellini the chance to celebrate human imagination and engage in an audiovisual condemnation of "the society of the spectacle." (As a point of fact, Marcus argues that Fellini's film condemns postmodernism, but I find her use of this term a bit confusing, especially since Fellini in many ways *is* a postmodern director.)

As was already the case with her previous book on Italian cinema, *Italian Cinema in the Light of Neorealism* (1986), Marcus offers her readers very thorough, finely written, and informative readings of individual films all the while framing them—and here I stress the utter partiality of my remarks—in a theoretical framework of a humanistic kind. It is, in other words, my impression that Marcus's approach to cinema privileges literary and humanistic intertextuality, thus overlooking cinema's inscription in audiovisual technology. She reads and writes about films in the same way one usually reads and writes about literature, as if the advent of cinema and postmodernity had not brought about the need for a critical reevaluation of such concepts as "art," "artist," "poetry," and "meaning."

To conclude, a general observation which may be less a flaw in the book under consideration here than a reflection of my own idiosyncrasies. *Filmmaking by the Book* avails itself of the author's familiarity with recent critical theory, which, among other things, finds objective interpretation impossible, reading being an always already historically situated encounter between a reader and a text. Multiculturalism finds its source here, in the awareness that there are different and competing cultures and subjectivities, with their different and competing readings of the object, any object. For example, what to us (white West) seemed "the discovery of the New World," to others seemed a "genocidal conquest." This, indeed, is a commonplace, and I have no doubt that the author of this book would subscribe to it. But as a consequence of this awareness, authors should provide their readers with an idea of the relationship between themselves as historical subjects and the texts being analyzed. Differently put, I expect a work of criticism to give an idea of its author's position. We cannot keep writing as if the intertextual and intratextual links we ascertain in a text were objectively there, and, above all, as if such links were indeed the most relevant. Accountability for one's strategies ought to be, I believe, a must. The author of this book never comes forward as an embodied subject who has an axe to grind, even if it is the axe of professional and academic competence.

MAURIZIO VIANO

■ Maurizio Viano teaches at Wellesley College; he is the author of *A Certain Realism: Making Use of Pasolini's Film Theory and Practice* (reviewed in this issue).

The Films of the Eighties

A Social History

By William J. Palmer. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993. $39.95.

This book, a sequel to William J. Palmer's *Films of the Seventies* (Scarecrow, 1987), attempts to scrutinize the ways that 1980s productions represented, influenced, and were influenced by the social and political history of the decade. The book is divided into two sections, dealing with international issues (the Vietnam War, terrorism, and the threat of nuclear war) and domestic issues (the farm crisis, racism, and portrayal of "yuppies"). Each section discusses films that address these topics.

The literature examining film as a medium of social and political history is, by now, quite voluminous, even that dealing specifically with the Reagan years, but Palmer does not acknowledge, nor enter into a dialogue with, critics and scholars who have examined social functions of film since virtually the advent of the medium. The decades of research and commentary on the sociology of American film go unacknowledged. Instead, publications such as *Newsweek* are regularly cited when sociological evidence is needed. The apparent limitations of Palmer's basic research for the book produce a series of odd, and occasionally troubling, assertions throughout the text. The book's film history is misleading and sometimes erroneous. Palmer asserts, for example, that "the history of the treatment of the Vietnam War in movies begins in 1976 with the film *Taxi Driver,*" passing over the extensive references to the region in films of the 1950s, 1960s, and pre-*Taxi Driver* 1970s, comprehensively documented in the Dittmar-Michaud anthology, *From Hanoi to Hollywood.*

In another unsupportable assertion, Palmer claims that in the films of the 1980s, corporate villains were conspicuously absent, but this assertion must be predicated upon a failure to consider the prominent cycle of dystopic science-fiction films (*Blade Runner, Robocop, Total Recall,* the *Alien* series, among others), in which corrupt futuristic corporations function as the prime index of social decay and venality.

More problematic than the book's eccentric rendition of film history is its superficial social and historical analysis. The film cycles examined—Vietnam War films, terrorism films, farm-crisis films—are discussed in relation to social issues that receive only the most limited accounting. The Reagan years are regarded by Palmer as a replay of the 1950s, a misleading analogy and one that does not deal with the deliberate effort of traditional and neo-conservatives to seize control of the cultural agenda

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in the 1980s, and the long period of often brilliant political strategizing following the Goldwater defeat in 1964 that preceded and built toward the 1980 electoral victory. Palmer emphasizes "the socio-political stability of the decade," glossing over the right's own self-acknowledged need for an adversarial culture to define itself against. The right's perception of just such an adversarial culture, made up of radical students, women's libbers, gays, bohemian artists, and intellectuals, fueled the highly divisive and emotional politics of the period. The fractious 1980s were very far from the dormant 1950s.

As another indicator of insufficient contextualization, terrorism, in Palmer's analysis, suddenly appears in the cultural imagination because of several high-profile bombings and hijackings, but there is no effort to date its specific emergence as a political trope in the public pronouncements of government officials or think-tank pundits, nor any appreciation for the way this trope figured in the deliberate launching of a new Cold War in the early 1980s.

The limitations of the book's social analysis are most apparent in the discussions of the Vietnam War. No effort is expended to engage the history or chronology of the war. Instead, consistent with the dominant cultural myth constructed about that conflict—Vietnam as a baffling quagmire defying understanding—Palmer regards the war as an event devoid of meaning or order. "Ultimately, the history of the Vietnam War is a perfect postmodernist text. Ultimately, the history of the Vietnam War is a holographic, multilayered history of nothingness, of an event that never had, ever actively denies, meaning." It is not simply odd, but really perverse, for a critic of American social history and political film to assert that a debacle as profound as Vietnam has no meaning.

Palmer's fondness for themes of nihilism and confusion, his discomfort with the divisive and polarizing nature of politics, and his reluctance to engage politically and morally with the social topics depicted in and by the films help produce a strangely apolitical book. American film is an extremely vibrant medium of social representation and discourse, and it deserves, as does a decade as important as the eighties, a nuanced, penetrating, and socially engaged exegesis. A critic who cannot make sense of Vietnam or of U.S. intervention in Central America should probably be looking for some other topic on which to write.

STEPHEN PRINCE

■ Stephen Prince teaches at Virginia Tech and is the Book Review Editor of *Film Quarterly*.

The Glamour Factory

Inside Hollywood's Big Studio System

By Ronald L. Davis. Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993. $29.95 cloth; $14.95 paper.

This examination of the work that went into making movies during Hollywood's classical era stands out as something of a hybrid. Published by a university press, it nonetheless has backcover blurbs by Jane Wyatt, Robert Stack, and C. David Heymann, the author of *A Woman Named Jackie*. Moreover, at its best, it combines a Bordwell/Staiger/Thompson thoroughness with a terrific ear for anecdote and the *haute*-trash sensibility of biographer-of-the-stars Barbara Leaming.

As much as writing *The Glamour Factory,* Ronald L. Davis has compiled it. Made up largely of sections of interviews from the SMU Oral History Program, the book is an organizational marvel rather than a methodological one; as Davis cuts and pastes his citations into narratives about work in the various departments of the Hollywood studios between, roughly, 1925 and 1965, he includes not only directors, producers, writers, and other high-profile professions but also makeup artists, talent scouts, and set painters. What Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog did for the costume department in *Fabrications*, and Thomas Schatz did for the upper echelons of production in *The Genius of the System,* Davis attempts to do for almost all aspects of Hollywood filmmaking.

Studio employees tell wonderful stories in *The Glamour Factory*. While learning her craft, contract player Carol Bruce studied with fabled acting coach Maria Ouspenskaya. When told to act like an apple, a mystified Bruce blew out her cheeks and made a face, while Ouspenskya exulted, "Magnificent! Wonderful. You have imagination." Fox production chief Winfield Sheehan, believing in a boot-camp approach to film production, made his guards stand at attention and salute whenever he entered the studio. Indeed, many of the best anecdotes in the book concern obsessive-compulsive executives who make Sheehan seem like a model of composure and good sense: David O. Selznick's anxiety over the size of Rock Hudson's Adam's apple, for instance, and Jack Warner's edict against actors wearing striped ties in Warner Bros. films. If these stories teach us anything, it is that Hollywood executives were simply those men who were willing to make decisions immediately and forcefully, no matter how irrational they may have been.

There is, of course, a surfeit of books with great Hollywood stories. Even books claiming a more scholarly approach to the work of making movies—Patrick

in the 1980s, and the long period of often brilliant political strategizing following the Goldwater defeat in 1964 that preceded and built toward the 1980 electoral victory. Palmer emphasizes "the socio-political stability of the decade," glossing over the right's own self-acknowledged need for an adversarial culture to define itself against. The right's perception of just such an adversarial culture, made up of radical students, women's libbers, gays, bohemian artists, and intellectuals, fueled the highly divisive and emotional politics of the period. The fractious 1980s were very far from the dormant 1950s.

As another indicator of insufficient contextualization, terrorism, in Palmer's analysis, suddenly appears in the cultural imagination because of several high-profile bombings and hijackings, but there is no effort to date its specific emergence as a political trope in the public pronouncements of government officials or think-tank pundits, nor any appreciation for the way this trope figured in the deliberate launching of a new Cold War in the early 1980s.

The limitations of the book's social analysis are most apparent in the discussions of the Vietnam War. No effort is expended to engage the history or chronology of the war. Instead, consistent with the dominant cultural myth constructed about that conflict—Vietnam as a baffling quagmire defying understanding—Palmer regards the war as an event devoid of meaning or order. "Ultimately, the history of the Vietnam War is a perfect postmodernist text. Ultimately, the history of the Vietnam War is a holographic, multilayered history of nothingness, of an event that never had, ever actively denies, meaning." It is not simply odd, but really perverse, for a critic of American social history and political film to assert that a debacle as profound as Vietnam has no meaning.

Palmer's fondness for themes of nihilism and confusion, his discomfort with the divisive and polarizing nature of politics, and his reluctance to engage politically and morally with the social topics depicted in and by the films help produce a strangely apolitical book. American film is an extremely vibrant medium of social representation and discourse, and it deserves, as does a decade as important as the eighties, a nuanced, penetrating, and socially engaged exegesis. A critic who cannot make sense of Vietnam or of U.S. intervention in Central America should probably be looking for some other topic on which to write.

STEPHEN PRINCE

■ Stephen Prince teaches at Virginia Tech and is the Book Review Editor of *Film Quarterly*.

The Glamour Factory

Inside Hollywood's Big Studio System

By Ronald L. Davis. Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993. $29.95 cloth; $14.95 paper.

This examination of the work that went into making movies during Hollywood's classical era stands out as something of a hybrid. Published by a university press, it nonetheless has backcover blurbs by Jane Wyatt, Robert Stack, and C. David Heymann, the author of *A Woman Named Jackie*. Moreover, at its best, it combines a Bordwell/Staiger/Thompson thoroughness with a terrific ear for anecdote and the *haute*-trash sensibility of biographer-of-the-stars Barbara Leaming.

As much as writing *The Glamour Factory,* Ronald L. Davis has compiled it. Made up largely of sections of interviews from the SMU Oral History Program, the book is an organizational marvel rather than a methodological one; as Davis cuts and pastes his citations into narratives about work in the various departments of the Hollywood studios between, roughly, 1925 and 1965, he includes not only directors, producers, writers, and other high-profile professions but also makeup artists, talent scouts, and set painters. What Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog did for the costume department in *Fabrications*, and Thomas Schatz did for the upper echelons of production in *The Genius of the System,* Davis attempts to do for almost all aspects of Hollywood filmmaking.

Studio employees tell wonderful stories in *The Glamour Factory*. While learning her craft, contract player Carol Bruce studied with fabled acting coach Maria Ouspenskaya. When told to act like an apple, a mystified Bruce blew out her cheeks and made a face, while Ouspenskya exulted, "Magnificent! Wonderful. You have imagination." Fox production chief Winfield Sheehan, believing in a boot-camp approach to film production, made his guards stand at attention and salute whenever he entered the studio. Indeed, many of the best anecdotes in the book concern obsessive-compulsive executives who make Sheehan seem like a model of composure and good sense: David O. Selznick's anxiety over the size of Rock Hudson's Adam's apple, for instance, and Jack Warner's edict against actors wearing striped ties in Warner Bros. films. If these stories teach us anything, it is that Hollywood executives were simply those men who were willing to make decisions immediately and forcefully, no matter how irrational they may have been.

There is, of course, a surfeit of books with great Hollywood stories. Even books claiming a more scholarly approach to the work of making movies—Patrick

McGilligan's *Backstory* volumes come to mind—usually wind up as collections of gossip, rumor, and mythology, with no sense of day-to-day studio activity. For film scholars, then, the real strengh of Davis's book is that it clearly focuses on work—what a range of people did every time they turned up at the office, how long it took, what they got paid, and how they felt about it. And at all times, Davis examines not only the high-profile employees but also the low. Thus, for instance, we learn that "Lana Turner by 1941 already made $1550 a week at Metro; on the other hand, five years later, as a star at low-budget Republic, Catherine McLeod earned $450 a week." This collection of numbers provides some of the book's greatest value. In the chapter on executives and producers, for example, Davis explains how Sol Wurtzel, head of B production at 20th Century-Fox during the thirties and forties, "turned out 70-minute pictures for $90,000 or less," and how, at Warners, "for short A pictures thirty-two days would be allowed, for extra-long pictures forty-two days." Davis also works, at least at times, to demystify the production process by concentrating on an extreme division of labor rather than inspired individual creation. Contract player Adele Mara likened her own studio work to punching a time clock at a Ford factory, and Metro fashion editor Ann Straus stressed the assembly-line production that readied stars for the cameras, with the stars' bodies balkanized into jealously guarded principalities. Some makeup specialists worked from the chin up, others from the chin down, and "nobody was allowed on anybody else's territory."

There are, however, problems with letting Hollywood employees simply speak for themselves. Davis cites Bette Davis's description of her famous suit against Warner Bros. as if it were gospel, and so we are left, simply, with a portrait of the artist oppressed by the institution, even though things were not so simple. And the author himself seems only too willing to buy into the mythology that much of the book works to deconstruct. Davis claims, for instance, that Adolf Zukor "dreamed about making feature-length films to replace the one- and two-reelers currently in vogue" during the early part of the century, with industrial history, changing audience demographics, studio competition, and other determinants in the shift to feature films having, apparently, far less importance than the will of the inspired individual. Similarly, production at MGM during the early thirties gets reduced to family melodrama, as "jealousy, greed, and a thirst for power pulled the Mayer-Thalberg partnership apart." At the lower end of Hollywood production, too many employees still tend to vanish, and too much about Hollywood labor stays unexamined. Ann Straus, for instance, recalled the costume department at MGM and spoke of the "sixteen Mexican women who worked on the department's second floor." Straus added that "they brought their lunch in brown bags and never went out on the lot. . . . They never knew the people for whom they were doing the work. They just knew it was production number 1420 and that was all." In Davis's text, these "Mexican women" remain nameless, and Davis himself formulates no critique of the Metro sweatshop or of studio policies that so clearly intersect with issues of immigration, class, gender, and race.

Finally, then, this is a book with some wonderful insights into film history, but one that lacks a coherent historical methodology. It is still, however, a potentially valuable text because of the way that it stresses not simply labor but all manner of labor. Reading through *The Glamour Factory,* it is impossible not to prefer some sections over others. "Around the Lot," my own favorite, highlights the work of studio messengers and commissary employees, a work force that, to my knowledge, has never been discussed in detail in any Hollywood history. For this alone, *The Glamour Factory* performs a valuable function in film studies, and may serve as a foundation for more greatly nuanced work to come.

ERIC SMOODIN

■ Eric Smoodin teaches at The American University and is the author of *Animating Culture: Hollywood Cartoons from the Sound Era* (Rutgers University Press).

Hollywood on the Couch

A Candid Look at the Overheated Love Affair Between Psychiatrists and Moviemakers

By Stephen Farber and Marc Green. New York: William Morrow, 1993. $22.50.

In 1925, Samuel Goldwyn offered Sigmund Freud $100,000 to consult on a project about historical love affairs—Anthony and Cleopatra's, for openers. Despite the desperate state of his finances after the Great War, Freud promptly telegraphed Goldwyn a resounding *Nein!* The founding father was generally dismissive about cinema and its creators. Nevertheless, within a decade, a cadre of therapists had succumbed to Hollywood's siren song and were winning a secure purchase upon its hearts, minds, and purses.

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Stephen Farber and Marc Green's fascinating but uneven book describes the impact of psychoanalysis upon the industry inside and outside the consulting room. The authors' abiding focus is the codependency which sprang up between Tinseltown's therapeutic elite and the creative talents who sought their help. The cure often appears to have been worse than the narcissistic disease, and also partook of it.

European emigres were influential members of Hollywood's first therapeutic tribe. Their flight from Nazi persecution left them impoverished, stripped of their former prestige; frequently, they were forced to retrain from the ground up before being licensed. Arthur Penn (one of the numerous film folk quoted who have done couch time) suggests these humiliated pioneers profoundly craved recognition in their new homeland. As their practices flourished, they began measuring their success not only by the size of their fees but by the prestige of their patients as well. The Americans who later became therapeutic luminaries in the movie colony possessed personality traits similar to those of the foreign-born analysts (and of a significant number of their clients as well). They were immensely ambitious, charming, often autocratic self-promoters. The size of their egos did not necessarily match the depth of their skills.

Just as it had on the Continent earlier in the century, psychoanalysis initially enjoyed a warmer reception from artists and intellectuals than from clinicians in the United States. Screenwriters were fervent early Hollywood analysands, and soon busily larded their scripts with Freudian notions about character and motivation. Directors like Joseph L. Mankiewicz used techniques borrowed from therapeutic experience to become analysts *manqués* in aid of eliciting stronger performances. Further down the line, Lee Strasberg's analytically inflected Method became a virtual thespian religion. Spreaders of the faith wielded enormous clout on legitimate stage as well as soundstage.

A more positive attitude toward therapy emerged after World War II, as doctors who had used analytically based strategies to repair the shattered psyches of combatants returned to private practice. The authors argue that movies crafted by analysands also contributed strongly to popularizing treatment. It's equally possible that pro-therapy pictures reflected the surging collective interest in mental health. In any case, industry people at every level now flocked into treatment. Some wanted relief; others, faddish as adolescents and ever vigilant for an edge over the competition, sought to prove they could be as conflicted—and thus creative—as any other neurotic on the block.

By the 1950s, Hollywood had institutionalized analysis—or its own idiosyncratic spin on analysis. Superstar doctors like May Romm, Milton Wexler, and the eponymous Theodore Hacker regularly defied Freud's dictums about the "purity" of the analytic relationship. They dropped names (and problems) of famous patients, socialized with clients, secured them jobs through other analysands, and even pressured studios on their behalf (e.g., Dr. Herbert Kupper, one of Judy Garland's multitude of shrinks, was able to persuade producer Arthur Freed to take Garland's husband and director Vincente Minnelli off *Easter Parade*—thereby sending Minnelli himself into treatment).

Analysts became so highly regarded that they were hired to consult with film-makers, a practice which has evolved into a cottage industry. In time, the script doctors passed from giving advice on how to make a picture more psychologically apt or compelling, and thus supposedly more salable (dicey territory indeed for a clinician), to recommending censorship along dreary bourgeois/conformist lines.

Dr. Aaron Stern pursued this questionable ideological agenda during his tenure as powerful ratings consultant to the Motion Picture Association of America. He became an intimidating and dispiriting force within the industry, until he resigned under fire in 1973 to set up shop as "head of special projects" for Columbia Pictures. Stern's producing career floundered; other therapists who ventured into making films rather than merely treating their makers, or tried to blend making and mending, fared little better (e.g., Milton Wexler, Blake Edwards' analyst, co-wrote *The Man Who Loved Women,* and scripted *That's Life!* on his own; both films were directed by his patient, and were box-office duds).

If analytic doyens like Wexler used Hollywood patients to stoke their image, they were often mercilessly exploited by the system in return. However essential the analysts viewed their endeavors, clients with sufficient clout and inflamed narcissism (LaLa-land's endemic disorder) were likely to rank a doctor somewhere beneath a tennis coach. Stars and moguls demanded and received treatment at pool or bedside, frequently on slim or suspect grounds. Goldwyn and Selznick regularly employed therapists to keep unruly actors, spouses, or children in line. Producer Ray Stark shamelessly manipulated the respected, ordinarily canny Dr. Judd Marmor to help get David Begelman off the hook during the notorious Columbia Studios check-forging scandal of 1977. And so it went.

Over the past decade, the analyst's star has been on the wane. Traditional psychotherapy has been replaced by psychobabble nostrums ministering to the new narcissism—Est, Lifespring, et al. Now personal trainers and cooking classes are the rage on the feelgood circuit. Pumping up pecs and finding the most succulent shiitaki mushrooms are more prized than resolving Oedipal dilemmas.

Farber and Green document this curious history from generally reliable sources. But on other issues they can be dead wrong, irresponsible, or plain ignorant (as in their dismissiveness toward qualified lay analysts). When venturing upon conjectural grounds, they often resort to the irresponsible subjunctive. They speculate that such and such "may" be so; shortly, some questionable notion is presented as if the "may" had advanced from the realm of speculation to self-evident fact: e.g., the assertion that Woody Allen's "interminable analysis . . . *may* have instilled . . . an added feeling of entitlement . . . " (italics mine) leads the authors to state as received truth later on that Allen's therapy "obliterated his superego, leaving him a randy, reckless combination of ego and id."

The authors' acute observations about the analyst-Hollywood connection are considerably undermined by their gossipy, arch style (Anna Freud is referred to as the "diminutive doyenne"; psychiatrists of whatever age are labeled "greybeards") and a penchant for smarmy innuendo. For instance, they make an unsupported insinuation that Janice Rule's acceptance for analytic training was based more on the alluring combination of submissiveness to her "analytic elders" and appeal to these starstruck "greybeards" than her actual strong potential and genuine academic qualifications. Again, in a murky chapter on sexual indiscretions between therapists and show-business clients, an affair which occurred years ago between a prominent Manhattan analyst and a patient who had no connection whatsoever to Hollywood is dragged back into the light. The relationship had a terribly traumatic outcome for all concerned. It's downright malicious to pick over its bones now.

At one point, brief note is made that the indiscretions of the therapy *machers* hardly constitute a norm for less visible practitioners. But consistent with its "Geraldo" tone, the prevailing impression borne away from *Hollywood on the Couch* is that the analytic majority consists of arrogant fools or frauds who do nothing but promote egregious self-indulgence at exorbitant rates. You wouldn't send your dog to one of these narcissistic quacks, let alone Montgomery Clift.

HARVEY R. GREENBERG

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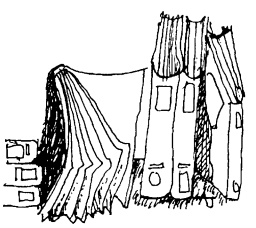

Inside Soviet Film Satire

Laughter with a Lash

Edited by Andrew Horton. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993. $44.95.

This anthology grew out of a conference on "The Spirit of Satire in Soviet Cinema" held at Loyola University, New Orleans, in October 1990, organized by Andrew Horton and Anna Lawton. While many of its essays retain the refreshing informality of oral presentation, others betray their conference origins in less attractive ways, privileging rhetoric above reasoned argument to a degree that suggests a policy of editorial laissez-faire. Nearly all of them, however, contribute something to our knowledge of Soviet/post-Soviet cinema, even where that information substantially duplicates other sources.

The book is divided into three sections, one on the historical and cultural context of Soviet film satire, another on specific films and/or directors, and a final section on satire in the *glasnost* era and beyond. There is enough overlapping of categories in this arrangement for it to seem arbitrary (Part One and Part Two both contain readings of NEP satires; Part Two and Part Three both deal with post-1985 films, etc.), and the editor's introduction itself—"Carnival versus Lashing Laughter in Soviet Cinema"—offers several points of confusion. In the first place, satire is never clearly defined as distinct from other modes of comedy—in fact, the terms "comic" and "satiric," as well as "farcical" and "ironic," are used interchangeably throughout this chapter. Horton does argue that satire is characterized by a "double-edged ambiguity" (paraphrasing his own *Comedy/Cinema/Theory* to the effect that nothing is "inherently funny, satiric, tragic, or absurd" [3]) and has two distinct modes—the joyful, or, *pace* Bakhtin, "carnivalesque," and the dark, accusatory "laughter with a lash" described by Eisenstein in *Notes of a Film Director*. This conforms to the distinction between Horatian and Juvenalian satire derived from classical literature and is perfectly clear. Less so are the five categories of "satire in a Soviet context" that follow, because they are neither mutually exclusive nor categorically distinct.

First, we are told that "irony and accusing laughter" are a potent form of survival in a totalitarian state; second, that they can function as both offense and defense; third, that such a view is sanctioned by Derrida and Foucault via the work of Hayden White; fourth, that it is possible for satire to serve the state as well as to attempt to subvert it; and, finally, that satire can exist in films like *Little Vera* that are not primarily satires. A final stab at definition, indebted to Harry Levin, suggests that satire is inevitably

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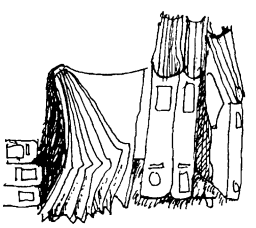

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ter images" [12]). We are left with an impression of satire that very much conforms to the word's original meaning as "a dish of mixed fruits" but seems intended for critical novices.

Not so the subsequent essays, most of which are scholarly, copiously annotated, and occasionally obscure. Several, indeed, depend for comprehension on a knowledge of filmic texts currently unavailable in the West. Kevin Moss's "A Russian Munchhausen: Aesopian Translation," for example, offers a rich subtextual analysis of allusions in a popular Soviet television series, 1979–1980; although it draws some interesting conclusions about the nature of pre-*glasnost* media censorship, the piece will be inaccessible to most readers as criticism. Other essays, especially those of Part Three, treat films that have either not appeared outside of the former U.S.S.R. (Eldar Ryazanov's *Forgotten Melody for a Flute* [1987]; Sergei Soloviev's *Black Rose, Red Rose* [1989]) or exist only in bootlegged copies (Karen Shakhnazarov's *Zero City* [1989]; Yuri Mamin's *Fountain* [1988]). To the extent that these pieces contribute to the general body of knowledge about Soviet/post-Soviet cinema they are welcome, but as close readings their usefulness is circumscribed by the absence of the text.

More valuable are essays devoted to historical context and those essays, like Peter Christensen's on *The Kiss of Mary Pickford* and Vlada Petric's on *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*, whose subjects are accessible for rental in the United States. Outstanding among the historical essays are Denise Youngblood's overview of Soviet comedy from the NEP through the Cultural Revolution ("We Don't Know What to Laugh At . . . "); Maya Turovskaya's interpretation of the constantly shifting credit roster for Grigory Alexandrov's *Volga, Volga* (1938) as a metaphor for the insanity of Stalinist terror; and Moira Ratchford's analysis of Alexandrov's *Circus* (1936) as a Socialist Realist musical propagandizing for the Stalinist Constitution of 1936 and a paradigm of Boris Shumyatsky's prescribed fusion of ideology and entertainment. Also notable are Vida Johnson's essay on "humor" in the films of Andrei Tarkovsky ("Laughter Beyond the Mirror") and Julie Christensen's paper on the work of Eldar Shengelaya as a self-contained body of Georgian national satire. Several shorter pieces—Valentin Tolstykh on "Soviet Film Satire Yesterday and Today," Michael Brashinsky on "Socialist Absurdism," Olga Reizen on "Black Humor," Andrei Codrescu on Mamin's *Fountain* from a Romanian point of view, and Horton's concluding dialogue with Mamin himself (a conference guest of honor)—provide nonacademic perspectives on the subject by practicing artists and critics.

The collection is illustrated by 11 captioned stills of varying quality, and it concludes with an annotated filmography and index. Perhaps in a fit of democratic zeal, the editor and/or publisher have chosen not to include author credits for individual essays at the chapter heads. This means that to determine who wrote what, the reader must turn back to the table of contents and cross-reference the essay's title, an irritating and time-consuming procedure. Like the oddly repetitious nature of the front matter, the many typos in the text, and the awkward placing of the stills, the omission of bylines is the kind of thing that good copy editing could have prevented. As it stands, *Inside Soviet Film Satire* is a useful work of scholarship that is less easy to use than it should be. Still, a certain diffuseness of organization and purpose notwithstanding, it ranks with such recent anthologies as Anna Lawton's *The Red Screen: Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema* (Routledge, 1992) as a book that no one involved in the study or teaching of Soviet film can afford to neglect.

DAVID A. COOK

■ David A. Cook is Director of the Film Studies Program at Emory University.

Making Things Perfectly Queer

Interpreting Mass Culture

By Alexander Doty. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. $39.95 cloth; $15.95 paper.

Nineteen-ninety-three was a bumper year for books analyzing Hollywood representations and misrepresentations of gays and lesbians. These included a reissue of Parker Tyler's pioneering 1972 opus, *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies,* Andrea Weiss's *Vampires & Violets: Lesbians in Film,* and this writer's *The Lavender Screen: The Gay & Lesbian Films.* All of the above focused on feature films, although lavender images and stereotypes on television have had far more influence than anything on the silver screen.

The smaller screen compensates for size and spectacle with familiarity and repetition. These usually result in taking for granted such characters as Pee-Wee Herman, Laverne DeFazio, and the Jack Benny persona. We're more likely to analyze, say, Tom Hanks's gay turn in *Philadelphia* than the undercurrents in Lucy and Ethel's or Lucy and Vivian's relationships.

ter images" [12]). We are left with an impression of satire that very much conforms to the word's original meaning as "a dish of mixed fruits" but seems intended for critical novices.

Not so the subsequent essays, most of which are scholarly, copiously annotated, and occasionally obscure. Several, indeed, depend for comprehension on a knowledge of filmic texts currently unavailable in the West. Kevin Moss's "A Russian Munchhausen: Aesopian Translation," for example, offers a rich subtextual analysis of allusions in a popular Soviet television series, 1979–1980; although it draws some interesting conclusions about the nature of pre-*glasnost* media censorship, the piece will be inaccessible to most readers as criticism. Other essays, especially those of Part Three, treat films that have either not appeared outside of the former U.S.S.R. (Eldar Ryazanov's *Forgotten Melody for a Flute* [1987]; Sergei Soloviev's *Black Rose, Red Rose* [1989]) or exist only in bootlegged copies (Karen Shakhnazarov's *Zero City* [1989]; Yuri Mamin's *Fountain* [1988]). To the extent that these pieces contribute to the general body of knowledge about Soviet/post-Soviet cinema they are welcome, but as close readings their usefulness is circumscribed by the absence of the text.

More valuable are essays devoted to historical context and those essays, like Peter Christensen's on *The Kiss of Mary Pickford* and Vlada Petric's on *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*, whose subjects are accessible for rental in the United States. Outstanding among the historical essays are Denise Youngblood's overview of Soviet comedy from the NEP through the Cultural Revolution ("We Don't Know What to Laugh At . . . "); Maya Turovskaya's interpretation of the constantly shifting credit roster for Grigory Alexandrov's *Volga, Volga* (1938) as a metaphor for the insanity of Stalinist terror; and Moira Ratchford's analysis of Alexandrov's *Circus* (1936) as a Socialist Realist musical propagandizing for the Stalinist Constitution of 1936 and a paradigm of Boris Shumyatsky's prescribed fusion of ideology and entertainment. Also notable are Vida Johnson's essay on "humor" in the films of Andrei Tarkovsky ("Laughter Beyond the Mirror") and Julie Christensen's paper on the work of Eldar Shengelaya as a self-contained body of Georgian national satire. Several shorter pieces—Valentin Tolstykh on "Soviet Film Satire Yesterday and Today," Michael Brashinsky on "Socialist Absurdism," Olga Reizen on "Black Humor," Andrei Codrescu on Mamin's *Fountain* from a Romanian point of view, and Horton's concluding dialogue with Mamin himself (a conference guest of honor)—provide nonacademic perspectives on the subject by practicing artists and critics.

The collection is illustrated by 11 captioned stills of varying quality, and it concludes with an annotated filmography and index. Perhaps in a fit of democratic zeal, the editor and/or publisher have chosen not to include author credits for individual essays at the chapter heads. This means that to determine who wrote what, the reader must turn back to the table of contents and cross-reference the essay's title, an irritating and time-consuming procedure. Like the oddly repetitious nature of the front matter, the many typos in the text, and the awkward placing of the stills, the omission of bylines is the kind of thing that good copy editing could have prevented. As it stands, *Inside Soviet Film Satire* is a useful work of scholarship that is less easy to use than it should be. Still, a certain diffuseness of organization and purpose notwithstanding, it ranks with such recent anthologies as Anna Lawton's *The Red Screen: Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema* (Routledge, 1992) as a book that no one involved in the study or teaching of Soviet film can afford to neglect.

DAVID A. COOK

■ David A. Cook is Director of the Film Studies Program at Emory University.

Making Things Perfectly Queer

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The smaller screen compensates for size and spectacle with familiarity and repetition. These usually result in taking for granted such characters as Pee-Wee Herman, Laverne DeFazio, and the Jack Benny persona. We're more likely to analyze, say, Tom Hanks's gay turn in *Philadelphia* than the undercurrents in Lucy and Ethel's or Lucy and Vivian's relationships.

Making Things Perfectly Queer is an entertaining and eye-opening collection of essays which put a queer spin on mostly familiar figures. Doty doesn't claim all the performers or characters concerned are necessarily "queer." He does feel that queerness may be the most pervasive dynamic in mass culture, albeit in disguised form. He states that "Only heterocentrist/homophobic cultural training prevents everyone from acknowledging this queerness," and allows that one reason for writing this and future books is "to speed the process of removing mass culture queerness from the shadowy realm of connotation to which much of it has been relegated." Unsurprising is the fact that many "queerly positioned" sitcoms were designed by heterosexual men, and that the dominant culture blithely employs queerness "for pleasure and profit in mass culture without admitting to it."

Doty contends that films addressed to mass audiences—*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *Internal Affairs*, *Thelma & Louise*—often encourage a wider range of queer responses from viewers than films specifically aimed at gay audiences. As with icebergs and Freud, most of the matter lies beneath the surface, and as it's harder to see, it's more open to interpretation and theorizing. Doty declares that a viewer may be a lesbian or a hetero female and yet experience and enjoy the gay erotics of macho buddy films such as *Red River* or *Butch Cassidy*.

Nor, he insists, are "queer readings" a case of alternative readings or reading too much into things. For "queerness" is a general term encompassing both genders, embracing homo- and bisexuality, and not invariably including sex. His chapter on female-centered sitcoms like "I Love Lucy," "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," "Laverne & Shirley," and "Golden Girls" notes the disposability of males in those characters' lives. Men may come and go, but the women were designed always to come back to and be there for each other. Doty engagingly dissects particular series episodes, among them *two* in which Laverne married Shirley. And he makes a convincing case that the occasional lesbian episodes of, say, "Golden Girls" serve to affirm, by contrast, the surface heterosexuality of a series' regulars, thereby reassuring viewers who peer too deeply below the surface or wonder why they're so glad to root for the single "girls."

One fascinating essay on Jack Benny's radio and TV shows offers up a small mountain of evidence for the Benny character's being those media's most popular queer character ever—almost entirely via the real Jack. Naturally, Doty parallels the reel with the real—with Pee-Wee/Paul Reubens too, whom he isn't the first to "out."

Another chapter re-reads certain films by homosexual directors Dorothy Arzner and George Cukor, and their casting of Katharine Hepburn in mid-1930s roles that were inherently butch and/or queer, i.e., *Christopher Strong, Sylvia Scarlett* and *Little Women* (and later, *Pat & Mike*). Doty reminds us that traditionalist Oscar voters in 1933 awarded Hepburn for her fey actress in *Morning Glory,* rather than for her more macho roles in *Little Women* and *Christopher Strong*, released during the same Oscar-qualifying period as her Eva Lovelace turn—which perhaps required more acting on her part!

By comparison, Doty's analysis of the queerness of Pee-Wee Herman's late kiddie series comes as no surprise, though the pervasiveness of gay clues and crypto-gay relationships makes one wonder whether CBS censors were asleep Saturday mornings. Until his second feature film, which turned his head and gay activists' stomachs (but no profit), Pee-Wee and his world were almost intentionally painted in shades of lavender.

However, most commercial productions' underlying queerness is less deliberate, occasionally coincidental—or Freudian. It's rather like religious myth, into which one can read varying degrees of reality, or none. Doty notes, "As far as cultural production and reception are concerned, a conservative gay white male's response to Mel Gibson's star image is as queer as one of Sadie Benning's punkish 'baby-dyke' videos." It's all in how you see it. And feel it. Above all, it's in acknowledging the diversity of human relationships, stimuli, responses, and readings.

BOZE HADLEIGH

■ Boze Hadleigh's latest book is *The Lavender Screen: The Gay & Lesbian Films* (Citadel Press).

Male Trouble

Edited by Constance Penley and Sharon Willis. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. $39.95 cloth, $16.95 paper.

Male Trouble is one of several recent books devoted to the critical remapping of masculinity in the visual media. Adapted from a special issue of *Camera Obscura* published in 1988, the anthology differs considerably from the original, some essays having been dropped, new ones added. Revisions made apparently reflect growth and change in men's studies, a relatively new disciplinary area that has grown out of feminist and gay/lesbian studies. Constance Penley and Sharon Willis acknowledge that the study of masculinity, even when conceived as "complex, heterogeneous, and conflicted," remains

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controversial within feminism, many feminists believing that this turn toward the study of men is dangerous at a moment of renewed attacks on feminism, both within and beyond the academy. (vii) Having acknowledged this, the editors might have chosen to offer an extended overview of recent developments in men's studies, describing conditions that have given rise to the field, as well as the internal debates that define it. And yet, perhaps due to pressures of the "journal-into-book format," the introduction is frustratingly brief, functioning chiefly to synopsize the anthology's contents.

Male Trouble is divided into three parts: the first cluster of essays is devoted to the study of psychoanalytic categories traditionally associated with femininity—hysteria, masochism, and narcissism. Parveen Adams, Kaja Silverman, and other authors share an interest in revising our understanding of the gendered aspects of these categories by demonstrating that in fact all three figure crucially in the composition of male subjectivity. Rey Chow's "Male Narcissism and National Culture," a study of Chen Kaige's *King of the Children* (1987), is of special interest, since it offers an alternative to the white, Western profiles of masculinity that are still too common in men's studies. Chow argues that Chen's film operates by means of a closed circuit of fantasied relations between the adult teacher Lao Gan and the male children, his students and a young cowherd, who become objects of his fascination. Although she identifies this closed circuit as an instance of narcissism, Chow adds that the teacher's subjectivity must be seen as a bifurcated one, divided between dedication to students (reference to education as site of cultural reproduction) and a fantasied "detour" into nature (promise of release from the burdens of culture) offered in the figure of the cowherd. Although woman is occluded from this scheme, Chow argues that Chen's apparent misogyny must be situated within contemporary Chinese culture: misogyny becomes the by-product of a subjective state that takes shape from a general dissatisfaction with Chinese culture, coexistent with an effort to bear the burdens of that culture conscientiously. Like many of the authors represented in *Male Trouble,* Chow attempts to analyze the "trouble" in masculinity not in terms of identity crisis (an individualist concept) but rather as a crisis within the subject that emerges in response to particular historical situations and cultural pressures.

The second section is a dossier on Pee-Wee Herman, a media figure frequently invoked in discussions of gender trouble. Essays by Constance Penley and Ian Balfour characterize "Pee-Wee's Playhouse" as a progressive text that activates play and the terrors of an uncanny space to disturb "culturally codified notions of masculine and feminine." (Balfour 145-46) In "The Sissy Boy, the Fat Ladies, and the Dykes: Queerness and/as Gender in Pee-Wee's World," Alexander Doty argues that earlier work on "Pee-Wee's Playhouse" by Penley, Balfour, and others has often been heterocentrist, celebrating the program's destabilization of gender roles in the absence of any sustained consideration of how Paul Reubens' identity as a feminine gay man may account for the program's insistent activation of queer codes and conventions. Surprisingly, Doty's is the only piece in the collection that points to the potential trouble with "male trouble" as a critical concept. Although the editors acknowledge that when the book's authors repeatedly promote the importance of troubling or undoing masculinity they are actually referring, more often than not, to the masculinity of straight white men, the problems inherent in this use of the term "masculinity" receive relatively little attention in the book.

The third and final section of *Male Trouble* provides close readings of visual texts by Steven Cohan, Sharon Willis, and others. The quality of these and other essays contained in *Male Trouble* is exceptionally strong, making this anthology essential reading for anyone interested in men's studies. However, given the recent outpouring of scholarship in this field, there is a need for more reflective critical discussions that would define the area's disciplinary coherence and chart out its long-term goals—goals that arguably should amount to something more than reacting against perceived limitations of feminism (e.g., promises to fill in the gaps of inadequate feminist models of spectatorship). Unlike feminist and gay/lesbian studies, men's studies lacks the connections to activism and the sense of marginalized, collectively produced identities that provide the first two areas with their definitions and agendas. Perhaps understandably, scholars of masculinity have avoided identifying their work with popular men's movements, which tend to be at best apolitical and self-serving, and at worst openly hostile toward women. Although the lack of a clearly defined activist, collectivist purpose should if anything make scholars of masculinity more vigilant when defining the motivations that guide their work, it seems to me that men's studies still lags far behind feminist and gay/lesbian studies in this respect. Ironically, one of the most intelligent, sustained discussions of men's studies appears in Tania Modleski's *Feminism Without Women,* but Modleski, who takes the dimmest possible view of the field, regards men's studies as a postfeminist phenomenon and urges feminists to return to the more pressing problems of women. Perhaps it is time to shift attention away from studies of the isolated male subject internally "troubled" by the pressures of patriarchy in order to focus on questions of the differences and affiliations between and among men. If available models for describing these relations are more often than not bleak, ranging from the "boys' club" to Eve Sedgwick's description of the male social continuum as

cut through by chasmic, seemingly insuperable differences, the more difficult task facing scholars of masculinity may be that of interrogating and defying patriarchy's rules for organizing the relations between men.

CYNTHIA ERB

■ Cynthia Erb is Assistant Professor of Film and English at Wayne State University.

Mediating Two Worlds

Cinematic Encounters in the Americas

Edited by John King, Ana M. López, and Manuel Alvarado. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press/BFI, 1993. $45.00 cloth; $21.95 paper.

Latin-American film, once the revolutionary chic of the international festival circuit, has for almost a generation now struggled to reestablish a role within countries reconstructing civil society while being battered by economic instability. As North Americans become fascinated anew with questions of cultural identity and expression from multiculturalism to Afrocentrism to border cultures, Latin-American film may yet return to international fashion. This collection of essays, ranging from the smartly journalistic to the somberly academic, should provide plenty of provocative approaches.

Criticism and scholarship of Latin-American film in Europe and the U.S.—where authors have developed a network of sorts—has historically, and unfortunately, been divorced from work by Latin Americans. Latin-American scholarship has often been crippled by lack of resources and the isolation of national intelligentsias. It also has not been easy to conduct research. Whole archives, recently that of Brazil's Embrafilme, disappear overnight. The holdings of the Cinemateca Uruguaya were carefully mislabeled for years, to protect them from censors. The most important film festival in Latin America for a decade, the Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana, consistently lacked a catalog.

So this eclectic collection of essays is a welcome contribution. It showcases mostly work from Europe and the U.S., with an intriguing occasional entry from Latin America. The book, and in particular Chon Noriega, also situates Chicano cinema as a distinctive expression. The essays are divided into two subject areas: stereotyping by Northern film-makers, and Latin-American film-making. Several essays suggest an often irreverent revisionism is afoot. Laura Podalsky finds in Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico!* footage an ecstatic celebration that she finds disturbingly reductionist. (The same argument has been made about Eisenstein's earlier Russian work.) Michael Wood charges that Buñuel's career in Mexico requires rethinking those convenient national labels we put on film-makers. Indeed, the long history of exile for Latin-American film-makers since Buñuel makes this point all the more interesting; Kathleen Newman picks it up from a different angle, when she looks at Argentine Fernando Solanas's nostalgia for nationalism, as out of sync with today's Argentina as is his ferocious Peronism.

Ana López reexamines excess as a cinematic strategy, whether as exercised by Carmen Miranda or by studio scriptwriters cranking out Mexican mellers, and sees in it indications of resistance to confining labels imposed by Northerners. Tim Barnard returns to the early and much-celebrated work of the Cuban Film Institute, and finds—as opposed to the received wisdom of yesteryear—an "ideological ventriloquism" rather than an openness of perspective. Julianne Burton-Carvajal charts changes both in the use made of "irregular coupling" in Mexican and Cuban film and in public reaction to such plot elements.

The book also features several overview essays. While Carlos Monsiváis's backgrounder is an expert thumbnail sketch of Mexican cinema's Golden Age, Paul Lenti and the late Nissa Torrents provide accurate, vivid portraits of the current Colombian and Mexican cinemas.

It is, of course, a mixed lot. Some essays, such as those of Ismail Xavier, Randal Johnson, and Carlos Monsiváis, are boiled-down versions of familiar (if admirable) theses. Several of the essays in the first section belabor their discovery of invidious south-of-the-border representations in entertainment films. Despite crisp editing and a pleasantly uniform short format, pedantic language occasionally creeps in. And everyone will find someone to disagree with. For instance, I find it hard to buy Rosa Linda Fregoso's argument that *Zoot Suit* is a "masculine discourse which masks itself as politics." I thought the movie was a daring exploration and critique of macho culture heroes. *Mediating Two Worlds* was designed around the notion of the Columbian quincentary, but the perspectives and inquiries it showcases will make it useful after the last posters for *Christopher Columbus: The Discovery* have been shredded.

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■ Patricia Aufderheide is an assistant professor in the School of Communication at The American University and a senior editor of *In These Times*.

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Melodrama and Asian Cinema

Edited by Wimal Dissanayake. New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1993. $49.95.

The increasing number of essay collections on Asian cinema indicates that the subject is now gaining the scholarly interest in North America that it deserves. *Melodrama and Asian Cinema,* along with the forthcoming *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts and Cinema in China and Japan* (University of Texas Press) and *Cinema and Social Change in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan* (Cambridge), shows that the field is vibrant and growing. This growth sets the stage for more in-depth studies on the subject, and it is to be hoped that such studies begin to appear soon.

Melodrama and Asian Cinema is based on papers given at the 1989 East-West Film Symposium held at the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii. Its editor, Wimal Dissanayake, is also editor of *East-West Film Journal,* and of another collection of essays on Asian Cinema, *Cinema and Cultural Identity.* This newest collection includes essays on melodrama in Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Indonesian, and Filipino cinema, as well as an introduction by Dissanayake and a conclusion by William Rothman, an editor of the Cambridge Studies in Film series.

One of the strengths of this collection is its emphasis on the perils, as well as the advantages, of applying Western theory to Asian cinema. The essays in *Melodrama and Asian Cinema,* many by well-known scholars of cinema, and of Asian cinema in particular, all apply crosscultural approaches to the subject, most of them carefully. The authors' references read like a basic course in Western theories of melodrama: Peter Brooks, Thomas Elsaesser, Christine Gledhill, Laura Mulvey, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. One essay on Indian film, by Paul Willemen, uses a Marxist approach; Ma Ning's on Chinese cinema uses Pierre Bourdieu's "general theory of practice"; and those of William Rothman advocate philosopher Stanley Cavell's work on film. Most of the authors discuss directly the issue of crosscultural analysis, taking their own cultural and scholarly backgrounds into consideration as they analyze the films of a different culture. Their consciousness of the pitfalls of their project, and their variety of approaches, provides a model for other Western scholars of Asian melodramatic cinema.

While such scholars must be conscious of their own cultural biases, and Western approaches may be helpful in understanding Asian cinema, this field also needs more specific information in English on Asian cinema itself. As William Rothman states in his conclusion, the essays in *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* are "most informative when they are attending to the Asian films they are addressing."(275) The most rewarding essays in the book are those such as Krishna Sen's "Politics of Melodrama in Indonesian Cinema" and Ma Ning's "Symbolic Representation and Symbolic Violence: Chinese Family Melodrama of the Early 1980s" which provide information on specific films in their historical and cultural contexts.

Unfortunately, *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* suffers from some problems common to some other essay collections on Asian cinema. Its organization is not as unified as one might wish; while the essays should and do present different views and approaches, they should still all address the same set of issues. Wang Yuejin's article, "Melodrama as Historical Understanding: The Making and Unmaking of Communist History," while extremely thought-provoking, focuses mainly on the melodramatic nature of history, and would be more effective in a different forum. Similarly, Susan Dermody's article, "The Register of Nightmare: Melodrama As It (Dis)appears in Australian Film," is an interesting study, but *not* about Asian cinema; nor does it touch directly upon the issue of crosscultural analysis. The title of the collection is thus slightly misleading: melodrama is a common theme, but not Asian cinema. Furthermore, since melodrama is a common theme, and many of the authors refer to many of the same Western scholarly works on melodrama, it would be preferable to concentrate descriptions of those works in an introduction, to avoid the repetition one sees throughout this book.

Numerous typographical errors, including mistakes involving Chinese romanization, add to the book's slightly rough quality. And although the book contains no acknowledgement of this fact, readers should also be aware that many of the essays have already appeared in *East-West Film Journal. Melodrama and Asian Cinema* is, however, the first book on a very important subject, and some of its essays are well worth reading. The discussion and debate which it presents, and the problems it raises, will pave the way for more extended studies of melodrama in individual Asian cinemas.

STEPHANIE HOARE

■ Stephanie Hoare teaches in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Colgate University.

No End to Her

Soap Opera and the Female Subject

By Martha Nochimson. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993. $40.00 cloth; $15.00 paper.

Nochimson starts out to right the wrongs accorded soap opera by popular and scholarly critics, to treat soap opera with dignity and respect, and to acknowledge its value for female subjectivity. She brings to this "the sympathetic perspective of the participant" (5) through her work as writer, consultant, and editor for five soap operas. This experience gives Nochimson privileged and valuable insights into soap opera which, unfortunately, are not given the centrality they could have had.

Nochimson bases her passionate study of soap opera on "the gender implications of Hollywood's master narrative." (20) Taking the position that "Hollywood film endangered feminine identity," (27) Nochimson sees soap opera as essentially different. Soap opera fosters the expression of female subjectivity repressed by the patriarchal domination of women inherent in mainstream film: lack of closure allows the continual expression of feminine desire; multiple plot lines refuse linearity and offer multiple viewpoints; aesthetic practices avoid objectification of women; characters aspire to "mutuality" in relationships based in feminine desire. As an antidote to the Oedipal analysis of feminist theory, Nochimson offers Persephone as the basis for soap opera's narrative: patriarchy (Zeus) is influenced by a woman (Demeter); Persephone (female subject) spends time with both the mother (Demeter) and the father (Hades).

While opposition to Hollywood style and narrative has long been considered the mark of a progressive film, Nochimson does not comment on the methodological problems of comparing films from the 1940s to daytime television decades later. Yet the masculine/feminine opposition which guides Nochimson's approach to feminist film theory does not carry over to her more open analysis of soap opera. She recognizes that feminine subject positions are not necessarily inhabited solely by women characters and contends that male characters can also be situated in these positions, observing that when feminine desire is expressed and filled, the community benefits. Nochimson argues further that soap opera's ability to avoid "conventional dichotomies" affords an opportunity to present race, ethnicity, and sexual difference from marginalized subject positions. She tempers this enthusiasm for the contributions of soap opera by acknowledging pressures on topical subject matter such as racist hate mail received by "Days of Our Lives."

This study of soap opera tantalizes most in its discussion of production conditions, its history based on advances in the expression of feminine desire, and its efforts to understand the formal specificity of soap opera. Nochimson draws upon an enviable collection of episodes, scripts, and interviews with producers, writers, and actors. While this is provocative material, available evidence is not fully marshalled to demonstrate points convincingly. Nochimson's knowledgeable descriptions of the collective nature of soap opera are revealing: speed and volume of production decenter creative control; actors and casting affect story lines, as does the essential yet enigmatic factor of charisma; networks, ratings, and sponsors have limited power. Institutions such as Irna Phillips, Agnes Nixon, and Douglas Marland receive a fresh look, as does the creative team behind "Santa Barbara"'s innovations. Unfortunately, this open and inclusive view of production is not focused, but scattered throughout the text and in the notes. Had these disparate discussions of production been brought together and developed in separate chapters, Nochimson's insights and knowledge would have made a significant and welcome contribution to the study of soap opera.

Nochimson concentrates more on dividing soap opera history into two periods, 1933–1978 and 1978–1988. The benchmark is Laura from "General Hospital," who "offered a new narrative of feminine identity unsuited to the Oedipal mold." (80) The first period covers radio and early television, when "the soap opera heroine succeeded in problematizing ordinary male identity by expressing disenchantment with male attempts to dominate and control her." (46) Early radio heroines provided a feminine point of view, but did not yet have "the capacity to implement." (52) Early television takes a step forward. Its "inability to replicate the glamorizing technology of Hollywood cinema" made the camera "a partner to, rather than the captor of, a new and evolving female subject." (55) In 1968, Victoria Lord's "active subjectivity" on "One Life to Live" "added to daytime television the POV shot (here establishing female interiority) and the feminine way of experiencing meaning through image." (68) Nochimson argues that the Viki/Niki story line opens the issue of female anger and associates fetishized images of women with disturbance.

The second "mature period . . . begins with the 1978 restructuring of 'General Hospital,' " (77) in which feminine desire was more fully developed. Laura "defines woman's appeal for man as the consequence of her active experience of her own desire; indeed, in her lies the possibility that female sexuality saves men from the excesses of the problematic relationship between masculinity and power." (83) Nochimson argues that Luke did not rape Laura because their sexual engagement "was almost completely free from association with dominance-

subordination eroticism." (81) Nochimson does not take advantage of this opportunity to explore the textual ambiguities which lead to the notorious presumption that Laura was raped. The views of a "General Hospital" writer about this controversial situation are relegated to notes.

In her discussions of soap opera aesthetics, Nochimson raises several issues which warrant attention but are not developed. She identifies three "cinematic methods effective in demobilizing the female body through the camera glance and making her into a possessed object." Lighting: men and women receive the same lighting treatment in soap opera, but in early television "there was little more to say about the lights but that they were on." Shot/reverse shot: "television shot patterns moved away from dominance and even suggested mutuality" by "even[ing] out the emphasis" on men and women, not allowing one to be "the beholder" of the other. Editing: in live soap opera "there was no editing of any kind," yet cliffhanger and commercial breaks "emphasized the fragmentary reality" of the narrative rather than concealing it as in mainstream film. (55-56) In later chapters, Nochimson analyzes specific story lines and scenes to illustrate aesthetics of "mutuality" and women resisting the "controlling gaze." She is not specific about technique, but the illustrations suggest that mutuality and resistance are attained through framing men and women in graphic equality and through facial expressions.

Theories are not fully explained, terms are not examined or defined, concepts are often difficult to comprehend, unsupported generalizations are frequent. The study would be much stronger if fewer pages were spent on strategies associated with Persephone and more were devoted to elaborating aesthetic practices and production conditions. It is in these pages that the substance of Nochimson's contribution to understanding soap opera rests.

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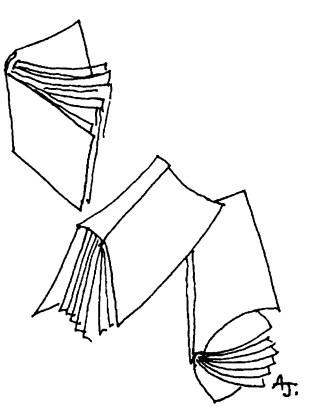

Reflections in a Male Eye

John Huston and the American Experience

Edited by Gaylyn Studlar and David Desser. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993. $39.95 cloth; $15.95 paper.

Given to donning the dictatorial director's garb of riding boots and jodhpurs, kicking around from one producer or studio to another as the feuds and troubled productions mounted up, followed by his reputation for boozing, womanizing, and gambling, John Huston was the American Director, Man of Action Division, that brand of slightly shamed artist who would rather be off hunting or horse riding than helming, which he described to Lillian Ross as "a left handed form of human endeavor." Testimony to the intense interest shown in Huston the man is found in the wealth of books that have dogged his cinematic trail. From Ross's *Picture*, about the making of *The Red Badge of Courage,* through "Making of . . . " books on the likes of *The Misfits,* to chronicles of *The African Queen* in both nonfiction (Hepburn's *The Making of the African Queen: Or, How I went to Africa with Bogart, Bacall and Huston and Almost Lost My Mind*) and fiction (Peter Viertel's *White Hunter, Black Heart*), writers have been drawn to Huston's robust manner, or at least to the Hemingwayesque face he presented to the world. Ray Bradbury's *Green Shadows, White Whale* is only the latest book to feature a version of Huston.

But what of the critical commentary? Regardless of one's evaluation of Huston the artist, he remains a major director who demands attention. And surely a masculinist of Huston's stripe would be an exciting subject for contemporary feminist or gender film studies. Yet according to the bibliography in Gaylyn Studlar and David Desser's intriguing new anthology, there have been no recent major critical assaults on the Hustonian citadel, despite the fact that a general interest book of some kind about the director is published every few years.

Consequently, *Reflections in a Male Eye* is a welcome contribution to a wide-open field. Yet it also harks back to the lively, contentious anthologies from the late 1960s and early 1970s, usually called *Focus on . . .* or *The Films of . . .* , in which diverse voices throughout the history of film criticism battled over the meaning and importance of films and film-makers. Almost more important than its contribution to Huston studies is this book's salutary inkling of a shift in publishing, for *Reflections* is the first in what promises to be a vigorous series of casebooks under the general editorship of Charles Musser.

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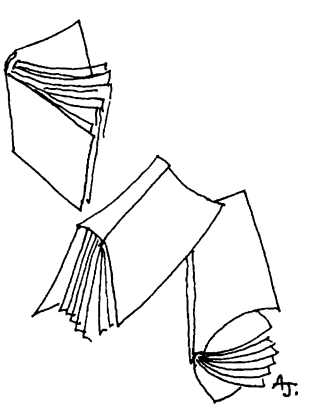

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Reflections gathers together 16 pieces, in a mixture of things by and about Huston, both reprinted and original. Co-editor David Desser (*American-Jewish Filmmakers*) explores links between Huston's war documentaries and elements of popular cinema at the time; Gary Edgerton assesses the impact of Huston's war documentaries on the rest of his career; Robert Sklar takes a detailed look at *We Were Strangers*, Huston's film about revolutionaries in Cuba; John Engell tracks the interplay of elements—source novel, script, acting and directing choices—that went into *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*; Stephen Cooper makes a convincing case for the importance of *Reflections in a Golden Eye*; James Naremore offers an in-depth analysis of *The Maltese Falcon*'s visual style; Mark Rubin discusses the concept of the hero in Huston's oeuvre; Virginia Wright Wexman takes a skeptical look at *Moulin Rouge*; and co-editor Gaylyn Studlar (*In the Realm of Pleasure*) pays sympathetic attention to *Fat City*. The collection concludes with reprints of James Agee's *Life* profile, and Andrew Sarris's assessments in *The American Cinema*, and later in the *Village Voice* on the occasion of the Film Society of Lincoln Center's honoring Huston in 1980. (An interesting sidelight for at least one reader is that by book's end, Sarris's penetrating grasp of a director's work and personality is reaffirmed.) Finally, there are two short stories ("Fool," "Figures of Fighting Men") by Huston, reprinted from *The American Mercury*, and a *Positif* interview from 1970 that walks Huston through most of his films.

Reflections is an intellectually exciting enterprise that challenges the reader with the many different Hustons who are refracted throughout this book, as the director's life, work, visual style, influences, and ideas are treated by several engaged and interesting minds. *Reflections in a Male Eye* is a promising debut for a valuable new series.

DOUG K. HOLM

■ Doug K. Holm is the movie reviewer for *Willamette Week* in Portland, Oregon.

Republic of Images

A History of French Filmmaking

By Alan Williams. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992. $19.95.

This new survey history of the French cinema is handsomely produced and will undoubtedly become the standard textbook for French film classes. A clear summary of the French industry, Alan Williams' book combines biographical detail and social context with aesthetic comments on particularly significant films and careers. Moreover, *Republic of Images* avoids long lists of titles and names that often interfere with synthesis and summary; thus, this text offers a relatively teachable framework. Several key areas, however, are sure to disappoint some film historians.

It is clear from the start that Williams has written this text in the tradition of many of the histories he cites and admires. Yet a film history published in 1992 ought perhaps to be more concerned with the very operation of historiography. For example, Williams writes in the introduction that his book centers on films "generally held as significant" and accepts "the notion—which for modern critics is quite problematic—of an established *canon* of significant films." (4) As a result, Williams retells rather than revises French film history, and he never questions previous sources, be they memoirs or anecdotes. He does not emphasize the advantages of *Republic of Images* over previous histories such as Roy Armes' *French Cinema* (1985, but out of print), except that this longer study does allow more space to connect biographical detail with the films.

Republic of Images is divided into five parts, Parts I and II on the silent cinema demonstrate that the lives of early film figures from Méliès to Gance influenced not only their reasons for entering the industry but also their interests and film projects. However, family background is often privileged over more pertinent generative mechanisms. Williams does explain that early film practice follows a *bricolage* logic. This concept lends unity to his discussions of early cinema, but in many instances Williams fails to convince us of early film's significance. He claims that Alice Guy is among the most important figures in early French film, but admits that little research has been done to show precisely what she did; he characterizes André Deed and other comics of the teens as "unwatchable today, though they were wildly popular at the time." (55, 59) Clearly, the silent era is not where Williams feels most comfortable.

The strongest sections of *Republic of Images* are Parts III and IV, "The Golden Age of the Sound Cinema" and "A New Kind of Cinema." These sections explain more thoroughly the connections between biography, industrial practice, and historical significance. Williams is very strong on the World War II years and their aftermath, as well as the traits of the Tradition of Quality and the postwar "closed shop" mentality within the industry; Parts II and III can help us teach this era productively.

The book's final part, "The *Nouvelle Vague* and After," however, is more uneven. Williams breaks the New Wave era into precursors (especially Melville), "reformist" directors who balance commercial and criti-

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cal success (Malle, Chabrol, and Truffaut), and more aesthetically radical film-makers (like Godard and Resnais). During the section on precursors, however, Williams again dodges films that do not fit neatly into previous histories and thus sidesteps a chance to move marginalized films back into film history. He argues that Malle, Truffaut, and Chabrol in particular, refined and reshaped French cinema, but fails to mention any Chabrol film between *Les Bonnes femmes* (1960) and *Les Biches* (1967), or after 1970. Similarly, key Truffaut features (*La Nuit américaine*, *L'Argent de poche*) are ignored. In the section on "aesthetic radicals," there is no mention of Resnais after 1968, and little discussion of the last two-thirds of Godard's career. Admittedly, no survey can pretend to be complete, but a textbook should clarify why one film is privileged over another and not sacrifice complexity and diversity for handy summary.

The final chapter, "Winds of Change," deals very well with Marin Karmitz and problems of contemporary production, but is too brief on the last 25 years of French cinema. This section could benefit from more serious consideration of directors Williams dismisses as the "television generation." Instead, it reads like a cynical obit for French film. Blier, Beineix, and Besson become spokespersons for the generation "who tried to change the world and failed" (401); thus they sound the "death knell of humanism." Since there is no clear canon for the past 25 years, a book *built* on canons should try to establish key texts to illuminate recent practice, from the challenging films of Duras, Carax, Mocky, or Hanoun to commercial successes like *Les Ripoux* and *Jean de Florette*.

Those of us teaching from this text, therefore, should be thankful for such a well-written survey, but wary of its role in reinforcing a particularly American vision of French film that relies heavily on secondary sources. This history provides a broad base, but requires its readers to open up the new ground. Moreover, contemporary French cinema offers a host of films that Williams has not allowed within the gates of his republic.

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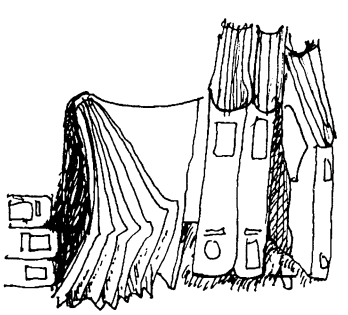

Risky Business

The Political Economy of Hollywood

By David F. Prindle. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993. $49.95.

What is Hollywood like today? What makes it run? In the same way that Stephen Hawkins tries to give us a unified theory of the universe, David Prindle tries to give us a unified theory of Hollywood. Here, however, instead of everything resting on "the big bang," the magic word is "anxiety." The word is interesting, yet it was hardly used in Hortense Powdermaker's early study when she characterized Hollywood as "the dream factory." But times change, and what Prindle argues is that "the house of nightmares" might be a more appropriate description.

In his short, interesting, provocative, and sometimes maddening book, Prindle tries to give us the "existential truths" about Hollywood industry and culture. According to Prindle, Hollywood is a community of superstars and extras, successes and failures, where almost everyone lives "in an emotional world characterised by paranoia, suspicion, resentment and dread." *Risky Business* examines these fears and the way they pervade the politics and economics underlying the complex interrelationships and struggles that exist among Hollywood's principal players.

The author's method for getting to the heart of things is to divide the problem into three areas and then analyze each in detail. As the investigation jumps from economic and industrial analyses to political paradoxes via sociological insights and pop psychology, the reader comes in for a strange, rough ride where the ultimate destination is not always clear.

Prindle's first major section, on economic anxieties, is the best part of the book. Like many others before him, he tries to deal with the central dilemmas of Hollywood . . . that it is a business whose product is art, and unlike most businesses the past tells you nothing about the future. In this section, Prindle provides an excellent survey of Hollywood today, from finance to distribution, and from the work of the majors to the organization of the independents. He also deals very well with the battles between Hollywood and the networks, and the growing threat of cable. In addition, Prindle provides fascinating detail of recent events such as the battles of the Writers Guild for higher residuals and the continuing warfare over syndication rights.

The second section of the book is labeled "Coping with Paranoia" and is a rather weak sociological investigation of interpersonal relations in the industry. Much of what Prindle says is true: the hunger for success, the

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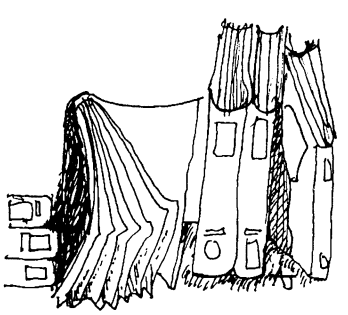

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incestuous nature of internal awards, and so on, but for the most part it has all been said before. Occasionally he goes off into dubious psychobabble which has to be taken with a pinch of salt. Thus many actors "have a low sense of self worth. The choice of the profession then allows them to play imaginary characters and thus escape their feelings of inadequacy." Where Prindle does make a real contribution is in his survey of Hollywood and AIDS and the way the disease has devastated the industry. This is hard but necessary reading, and well supports the underlying anxiety thesis.

How does one cope with anxiety? Well, one way is through activism, according to Prindle, thus neatly setting up the final part of the book. This last section, "Political Paradoxes," deals with political ideology, censorship, labor and management, and general activism. Here Prindle asks some genuinely interesting questions, such as why is Hollywood so vehemently liberal, even at the multimillionaire state. Unfortunately, the answers are not as good as the questions and sometimes strike one as being highly contentious. Thus regarding Hollywood activists, Prindle writes, "Although objectively their lives may offer wealth and adulation, subjectively they *feel* abused and exploited." I doubt it. And so it goes on. The economic situation is uncertain. Hollywood is full of maltreated minorities. Everybody feels oppressed and bears a grudge against the powers that be. Eventually, says Prindle, most Hollywoodites "endorse change in the prevailing economic, social, and political arrangements. Celebrities or struggling artists, they are all liberals."

By this time, Prindle's own conservative political views are well out in the open as the terms "left," "liberal," and "Communist" become almost interchangeable. The book also begins to read a little like an old John Birch pamphlet. Look out for that guy Norman Lear, he wants to attack the religious right. Look out for Robert Redford, he's for this thing called environmental protection. In fact, look out for them all because they wrecked Robert Bork's campaign and "the future promises an increasing attempt to 'Hollywoodize' the American political process. . . . The final irony of Hollywood politics is that the explosion of programming choices that promises so much diversity is instead likely to result in an even more monotonous political message."

Prindle's attitude to the medium, the makers, and the message is advertised even more strongly in the section on censorship. In his view, historians of the New Hollywood, with its greater artistic freedom, think that its movies are inferior to the products of the old studio system. What this means is that the old struggle between artists and censors "may actually have been good for the movies and that there may be worse things in entertainment than self-restraint." In short, move over, Michael Medved.

I disagree with most of Prindle's end views and yet this is a book I would recommend for three reasons. Firstly, it brings together subjects normally discussed in isolation, like economics, sociology, and psychology. In *Risky Business,* they continually bounce off each other, giving us some genuine insights into Hollywood. Secondly, the book shocks us out of our complacency, and by offering the politically "incorrect" view makes us questions our own acceptance of the system. Finally, *Risky Business* is full of details and anecdotes that will appeal to anyone interested in a more comprehensive understanding of the Hollywood mystique.

ALAN ROSENTHAL

■ Alan Rosenthal is a writer, film-maker, and former film lawyer who lives in Israel.

Screen Memories

Hollywood Cinema on the Psychoanalytic Couch

By Harvey Roy Greenberg. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. $29.50.

Harvey Greenberg analyzes films individually and pragmatically. It's not that he's uninterested in theory, merely that he sees it only as a tool that sometimes illuminates the problem at hand, and sometimes doesn't. Perhaps you associate Freudian analysis of art with analysis of the artists; Greenberg focuses instead on the individual *characters*, using the machinery of psychoanalysis to help us better understand these "people." Eschewing definitive readings, Greenberg gives us his personal take on the films, occasionally also genres, he's discussing. One more fact about the man should be evident from his writings, even if he hadn't told us—he really likes movies, even many terrible movies. He also suggests that a similar love should inform all film discussion.

The bulk of the book consists of Greenberg's views on 11 films, the three longest of which are reprinted from his 1975 *The Movies on Your Mind.* The Oedipal triangle appears frequently in his analyses, taking center stage in *Casablanca* and Spielberg's remake of *A Guy Named Joe* as *Always.* Obviously, Norman Bates and his mother have their Oedipal problems too. But *Psycho's* underlying world view is obsessional, with most of the characters stuck in their mean little unfulfilling roles, self-destructive, and often preying on others equally weak. Greenberg

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condemns both the film and Hitchcock for violently altering the history of cinema by legitimizing what he calls "the cruel cinema": films which abandon any attempt at cathartic response in favor of simply overwhelming the viewer's capacity to endure psychic pain.

For someone who enjoys movies, the last decade or so was pretty barren. A reborn blind patriotism mimicked wartime's simple endorsement of American military policy. Horror has been supplanted by the graphic violence of the cruel cinema. But clearly the worst trend is the overwhelming number of empty, unsatisfying films that Greenberg labels McMovies, featuring narcissistic characters in simplified situations seeking quick, definitive solutions, and often obtaining them through violence. He theorizes that the audience has also become much more narcissistic, more in tune with the ethos of late capitalism. And the studios radically changed during this period, completely losing autonomy as they were absorbed by giant corporations, ironically bringing back even greater vertical integration than the 1940s trustbusters destroyed.

Surprisingly, after his detailed, careful presentation of this case, Greenberg resists the obvious conclusion. In part he is able to identify some excellent new films, one of which he reviews—*Enemies: A Love Story.* Granted, this is virtually the opposite of a McMovie: almost every character is interesting, many are quite realistically neither simply good nor bad, and in the end several of the finer people move toward creating a better life for themselves. Still, I do not see how he can escape the logic of his own analysis, especially when that analysis can be strengthened in at least two important ways: he might notice even more aspects of contemporary culture deserving the label Mc*X* (advertising is a prominent, pernicious example, one that continues to help train the taste and expectations of us all). And he could identify two more categories of McMovies: comedies and "modern" romances.

Greenberg writes illuminatingly on newer films and old standards; if you're at all interested in the films he discusses you'll find interesting new perspectives in his book. He also has some deeply disturbing comments on the direction Hollywood films have taken and how this all too accurately reflects our society. Greenberg's analysis makes these problems much harder to ignore; it also shows that far more work needs to be done here.

KENDALL D'ANDRADE

■ Kendall D'Andrade chairs the Philosophy Department at Shawnee State University, where he also teaches film.

Window Shopping

Cinema and the Postmodern

By Anne Friedberg. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993. $28.00 cloth; $14.00 paper.

In the aptly-titled *Window Shopping*, Anne Friedberg provides an excellent, historically situated reexamination of the fundamental explanations that have been offered to account for the ascendancy of visual representation in the modern period. The reigning (if often unstated) model of vision for much recent film theory, according to Friedberg, has been the Foucauldian panopticon—the immobile, direct, all-seeing eye that embodies social power relations. By looking at the specific historical conditions out of which the epistemological dominance of vision was established in the nineteenth century, Friedberg convincingly explains why we should reject Foucault's model in favor of a gaze she sees as "mobilized and virtual" instead. Her larger project, however, is to interrogate the contemporary question of "postmodernism" in terms of this wider historical frame as well, and in this area, the book is less successful.

The first chapter offers the Baudelairean *flâneur*, as theorized by Walter Benjamin, as the model of our relation to the visible world, displacing that of the prison guard of the panopticon. The latter has always been problematic in film theory, as Friedberg shows, leading to what has perhaps been an undue focus on the male gaze in feminist film theory and to an emphasis on the notion of immobility in apparatus theories. Friedberg instead demonstrates the importance of the panorama (invented in 1792) and the diorama (1823)—both of which were defined by movement (even if virtual) rather than by immobility—as alternative models. Along the way, she usefully rewrites Baudelaire in gendered terms, producing a *flâneuse*, newly liberated through consumerism and the spaces to which she is permitted access, such as the department store.

In her second chapter, she takes up Benjamin more closely and offers, through the mediation of Adorno, an insightful, fresh reading of Benjamin's much-discussed essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and his uncompleted *Passagen-Werk.* Through Benjamin (with an assist from Marx) she discusses the ways in which experience itself became commodified in the late nineteenth century, especially the explicitly visual experiences of shopping and traveling. Iron construction created new public interiors and glass gave a boost to the primacy of the visual by facilitating the development of the shop window as proscenium arch. Throughout this discussion, Friedberg is a faultless and revealing guide, and our view of what might be called the

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prehistory of cinema spectatorship is dramatically altered.

Friedberg focuses especially on the "passages" or arcades, those public spaces on private property, that began to spring up in the capitals of the world during this period, and on the department store and the world exhibitions which, anticipating modern-day theme parks, stressed virtual traveling, seeing the world's wonders without having to leave home. (The book's chapters are themselves innovatively joined together by brief "passages"—thoughtful riffs on such subjects as Zola's department-store novel, *The Ladies' Paradise,* films that mobilize time, and the Musée D'Orsay juxtaposed against a Los Angeles shopping mall—which work to give the reader a slightly more visceral sense of this virtual *flânerie.*)

Friedberg next shifts her attention to the recent past and develops an fascinating reading of the relation between the postwar shopping mall and the arcade as analogous with that between postmodernity and modernity. She outlines the social history of the American mall and summarizes Baudrillard on consumption patterns to good effect, all the while never forgetting to consider gender questions, especially given the fact that some surveys show that 85% of people going to malls are women. (Along the way, she asks provocative questions, such as whether or not compulsive shopping might be an inchoate form of female protest against powerlessness, similar to Elaine Showalter's reading of the nineteenth-century female "hysteric" as a form of protest.)

The mall, in its deferral of reality and its tempting offer of a controlled experience, produces the same kind of subjectivity as that produced in movie theaters, most of which are now found in malls; the two thus become extensions of one another. Furthermore, with the advent of the VCR, cable TV, and the multiplex, with their unlimited possibilities of time-shifting and time-mixing, subjectivity, Friedberg argues, has become detemporalized as well. (Her argument here is somewhat less convincing, since reading three or four different novels during the same time period can presumably give you the same kind of temporal whiplash.) Her main argument, though, and it's an insightful one, is that the spatial and temporal *flânerie* of the contemporary spectator, with her or his mobilized, virtual gaze, is remarkably similar to that which has been described as postmodern subjectivity.

Up until this point, Friedberg has provided a fascinating, informative, and provocative juxtaposition of cultural history and film theory. It is in the final chapter and the epilogue, however, that I think her book begins to go somewhat askew. Friedberg quite rightly suggests that the term "postmodern" may have no meaning at all when it is applied to film, given film's complicated and ongoing relationship with popular culture, which has always been anathema to modernism (presumably, in Friedberg's terms, the necessary precursor of cinematic postmodernism). She also usefully insists on distinguishing postmodernism (as a style) and postmodernity (as a condition).

It's when she tries to locate the precise shift between modernism and postmodernism (a move that unfortunately entails having to define each) that the trouble starts. Isn't it clear by now how futile it is to try to settle these endless definitional disputes, which are always about unfixable and evershifting borders? Thus, in the course of her thinking, she has favorable things to say about Jameson's discussion of a "cultural dominant" and his refusal to try to establish a definitive moment of "coupure" between the modern and the postmodern (though Jameson's formulation seems little more than common sense). A few pages later, however, she does seem to think a decisive break can be found, and she asks, "How do we find a coupure, a historical or stylistic moment that separates the categories modern and postmodern?" (174) In the conclusion of the chapter, Friedberg claims that the virtual, mobilized gaze that is implicit in cinema spectatorship is a principal feature of postmodernity, but being so wrapped up in the definition of postmodernism, she never really satisfactorily demonstrates the connection.

In her conclusion, she offers the radical and interesting view that "cinematic and televisual spectatorship" leads directly to a loss of memory and a subsequent forgetting of the past. In her mind, this is a fortiori the case since the advent of the VCR, which enables us to jumble the past in any way we wish. Here she seems to think that postmodernity (or postmodernism?—the terms are beginning to get jumbled again) is a bad thing. However, she later suggests that, aligned with the disruptive potential of feminism, postmodernism can be a good thing too, and she ends her book on a note of undecideability between the two options.

In her final "Postscript on Feminism," Friedberg's ambivalence becomes even clearer and gets repositioned polemically in ways that I think are illegitimate. Her first two chapters constantly, and refreshingly, bring the question of gender into her historicizing of the mobile, virtual gaze. But after that point, the gender questions are more or less dropped, and she never really follows up on the specific dynamics of the gendering of the cinematic gaze. Thus, after more or less forgetting women during her discussion of postmodernity (in chapter 4 and the conclusion), she seems to regret this omission, and then turns around and displaces it onto men.

The postscript begins inauspiciously when she rather freely, "strongly" (in the Bloomian sense) interprets a quotation from Christopher Jencks ("Defining our world today as Postmodern is rather like defining women as 'non-men'") as being an "equation between the postmodern and woman." (193) She goes on to complain that

debates about postmodernism have displaced feminist concerns, and finds it revealing that early contributors to this debate were all men (before Linda Hutcheon, Linda Nicholson, and Jane Flax were on the scene); she uses what some might feel is a rather self-flagellating remark by the late Craig Owens to the effect that "postmodernism may be another masculine invention engineered to exclude women." (199) Yet she also criticizes male critics who do bring feminist concerns into the debate and suggests that they may be to blame "for one of the most striking features of postmodern discourse: the appearance of 'male feminism' in which men are, like the title character of *Tootsie* . . . able to have it both ways—retaining their cultural priority over women and poaching on the meager terrain of authority that women have seized." (198) Perhaps a simpler explanation for why feminists for so long steered clear of the pointless debates over the distinction between the modern and the postmodern is that they had better things to do with their time.

The full notes that grace the book and give such evidence of deep reading, along with the superb illustrations (many of them photographs taken by Friedberg herself) that clarify the theoretical and historical points, work to mitigate the effects of occasionally careless copy editing (French words, for example, such as "entrée," "arrondissement," and "abyme" are consistently misspelled). But this provocative historical reconceptualizing of nineteenth-century visuality, and of the ways in which the mall and the multiplex continue the dynamic of the mobile, virtual gaze, survives such minor faults, as it survives the overconcern about the relation of postmodernism and feminism.

PETER BRUNETTE

■ Peter Brunette's most recent book is a co-edited collection entitled *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture* (Cambridge University Press).

A Woman's View

How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930–1960

By Jeanine Basinger. New York: Knopf, 1993. $30.00.

When "women's pictures" are examined by many feminist scholars, the route taken is typically one of induction—to claim that one or several women's pictures serve as a paradigm for all women's pictures. These (few) films are in turn used to prove that *all Hollywood* films represent women in less than flattering ways. Jeanine Basinger, in *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930–1960,* laments this tendency, and chastises those who "oversimplify films." She contends that this category of feminist writing unfairly dichotomizes women (usually as whore/virgin) and otherwise reduces to stereotype the manifold configurations of women in mainstream films, most particularly in the women's picture. Through exhaustive examinations of both well-known (e.g., *Imitation of Life, Mildred Pierce, Kitty Foyle, Blonde Venus,* etc.) and more obscure works (e.g., *Day-Time Wife, Employee's Entrance, Female, The Guilt of Janet Ames,* etc.), Basinger makes a persuasive (if not always riveting) case for the women's picture as a rich, complicated, and subversive genre worthy of serious and well-informed consideration. She presents women's pictures as a full-fledged genre, with distinctive characters, settings, conflicts, and resolutions. Basinger makes a convincing case that while women's pictures cross over into nearly every other recognizable genre—melodrama, comedy, swashbuckler, musical, Western, et al.—they retain their primary characteristic: they are about women and women's problems.

Basinger examines the ways in which the genre reflects American cultural and social attitudes toward women, particularly in their relationship to work, family, love, and home. She inventories the construction of the image of women in this genre over the course of three decades, and demonstrates how this image has evolved—or failed to evolve. Basinger writes that these films which "[walk] the line between sordid truth and delirious escapism" present making a choice as the major action of their discourse. The choice nearly always circulates around love, and it is a cherished conviction of the genre that "love is a woman's job." An equally strong belief is that love will "wreck a woman's career." Basinger asserts that the main objective of the women's film is to question the terms of that choice, and it is herein that the subversive material of the genre is contained. A woman may be presented as happily and productively involved in her career for the first 85 minutes of screen time. But typi-

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Basinger examines the ways in which the genre reflects American cultural and social attitudes toward women, particularly in their relationship to work, family, love, and home. She inventories the construction of the image of women in this genre over the course of three decades, and demonstrates how this image has evolved—or failed to evolve. Basinger writes that these films which "[walk] the line between sordid truth and delirious escapism" present making a choice as the major action of their discourse. The choice nearly always circulates around love, and it is a cherished conviction of the genre that "love is a woman's job." An equally strong belief is that love will "wreck a woman's career." Basinger asserts that the main objective of the women's film is to question the terms of that choice, and it is herein that the subversive material of the genre is contained. A woman may be presented as happily and productively involved in her career for the first 85 minutes of screen time. But typi-

cally, she comes to the conclusion—in the film's closing moments—that all she *really* needs is a man. The question becomes: Which ideological position is the film condoning? Is it the career agenda dispersed across the length of the film, or the reversal at the film's end? While the woman is nearly always held in thrall to "men, marriage and motherhood—the big three of the women's picture," the alternate message of liberation—proffered with varying degrees of stealth—subtends the genre. It is no surprise to find an American genre steeped in contradiction. But Basinger does more than locate these attributes within the history of the genre, she claims that subversion and ambivalence characterize—with few exceptions—the essence of the genre. These notions are set forth with a dogged empiricism that is at once exacting and tedious.

Basinger also calls attention to the well of pain and anger that form the ubiquitous subtext of the women's picture. She writes, "These films contain female anger and frustration, and reveal hidden longing for freedom from biological tyranny." The women's picture summons forth this profound anger to "subversively reveal to women the hypocrisy of the repressive social system in which they are imprisoned." Women are seen as superior—sharper, smarter, more emotionally healthy than men in the genre, who generally, just "don't get it." Women turn to masquerade and deception, either to disguise their superiority or to underhandedly achieve their goals in a male-dominated world. The need for masquerade often finds women activating a second self: in the form of twins, good woman/bad woman leads, or in the alternate realities of sleepwalking, dreaming, or hypnosis. The mobilization of the second self induces the acting out of women's anger—a "kernel of defiance in all the pain and enslavement" that is the territory of the women's picture.

Basinger genuinely enjoys chronicling the delightfully unlikely plot contrivances ("crackpot plots") of the genre, and it is plot summaries, indeed, that make up the bulk of the book. (This methodology partially accounts for its rather plodding quality, and its lack of urgency and verve.) The book is also structured around the use of remakes (e.g., *Back Street*, 1932, 1941, 1961), skillfully employed to reveal the ways in which the stance toward love, career, and motherhood has changed over the course of time. Basinger has also amassed useful information from her research into magazines, box-office grosses, and other period material which serves to substantiate her contentions.

The author writes with enjoyment about images of women's strength and ability without being in the least dogmatic or polemical, a rare accomplishment in film studies. She is also particularly strong when she deals with the expressive ingredients of the genre, e.g., the uses of glamour and beauty. Her remarks on the transformative power fashion plays in the women's films are especially engaging. Basinger also writes evocatively on women actors, their looks, and their clothes.

In general, Basinger's writing is down-to-earth, commonsensical, playful, and humorous. She displays a great facility for interpolating lines of dialogue from the films, and this is done with a pointed wit. It must be noted, however, that while Basinger's work is rigorous, it is unencumbered by deep intellectual arguments, and there are those for whom this will present a problem. One wishes, as well, for more elegance in the writing, and the deletion of such phrases as "[V]iewers have seen what dreck her life was in the coal town." At times, her observations can be painfully obvious, as in this note on women and aging:

> Longevity was always a problem for female stars who rarely lasted as long as their male counterparts. When a woman reached the age of forty, she was considered too old to play opposite a twenty-year-old male, whereas a forty-year-old male movie star easily made love on-screen to females half his age. A man with wrinkles and white hair was thought to be sophisticated, elegant, experienced, while a woman in such a condition was over the hill. . . .

Basinger, presumably with a mass-market audience in mind, includes the most cursory overview of feminist film theory imaginable (a mere page and a half); it would be charitable to call this summary reductive. It is also hard to fathom the omission of a filmography in the book's appendix, or at the very least, a director's name following the many film titles in the body of the text. Nonetheless, *A Woman's View* is a contribution of substance—if not panache—to genre studies, feminist literature, and film history.

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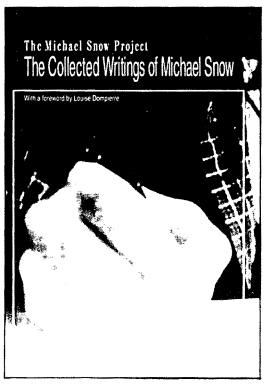

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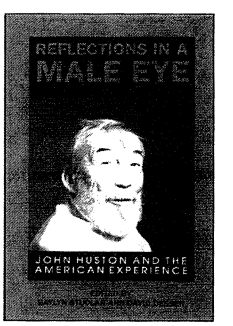

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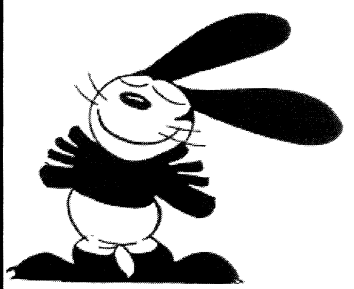

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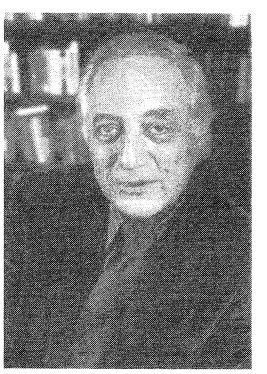

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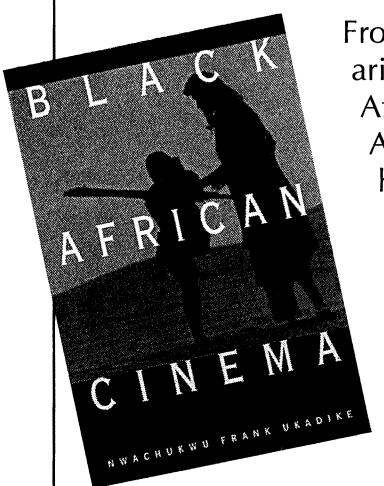

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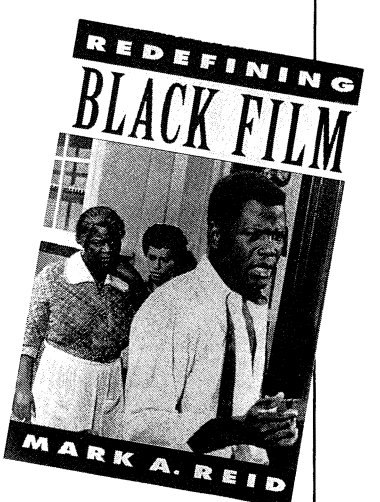

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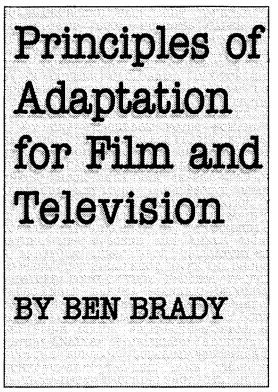

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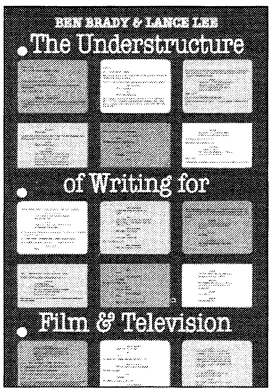

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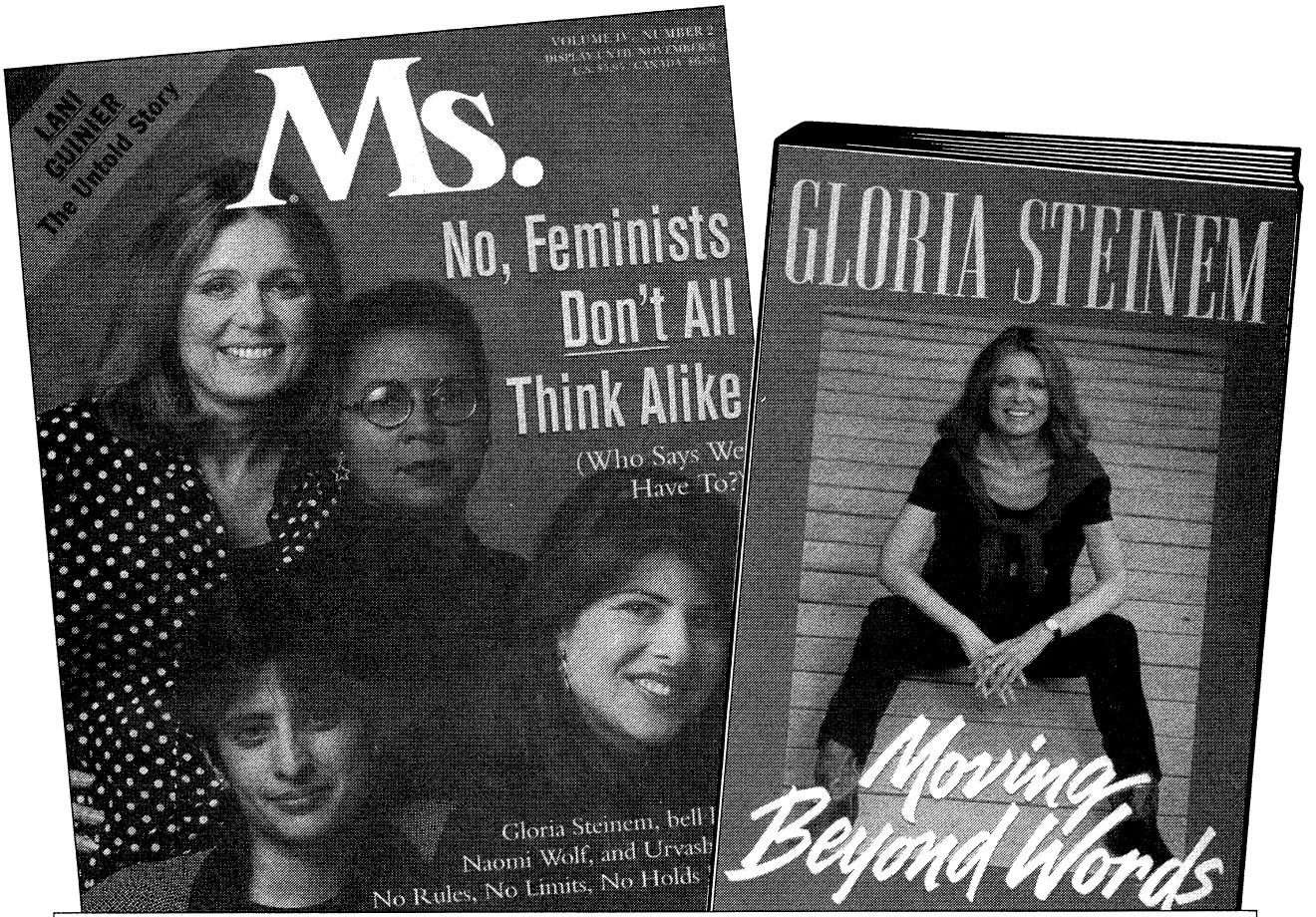

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